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Musical transmission and Palestinian exile narratives

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PhD thesis: Musical transmission and Palestinian exile narratives

Louis Brehony

King's College London

Declarations and Acknowledgements

I certify that this thesis presented for PhD examination at King's College London is the work of myself alone and accept responsibility for any errors or omissions.

Thanks are due to Duaa Ahmed, Mariam Al-Hasan and Mo Juhaider for assistance with translation at various stages of the research.

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Selected Arabic terms

While most Arabic words and phrases are explained or are self-explanatory, special mention should be made of the following:

<i>dakhil</i>	The “inside”, often used to refer to the Palestinians still residing in historic Palestine as opposed to the diaspora. Most often this references those inside the green line claimed as Israeli territory.
<i>dabke</i>	A form of line-based dance associated with Palestinian weddings.
<i>ghorba</i>	Place of exile, from the root غ - ر - ب denoting estrangement or otherness. Sometimes spelled <i>ghorba</i> .
<i>Intifada</i>	Literally a “shaking off” or shuddering but here meaning uprising. The <i>Intifadas</i> of 1987-1993 and 2000-2005 are commonly referred to respectively as the First and Second <i>Intifada</i> .
<i>maqam</i>	A scale or mode in Arabic music theory; plural <i>maqamat</i> .
<i>Nakba</i>	The “catastrophe” of 1948 embodied in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine by Zionist forces towards the creation of an Israeli state.
<i>shatat</i>	The diaspora, or that portion of the Palestinian people residing outside of Palestine.
<i>sumud</i>	Steadfastness, a tactic of resistance or “holding on” depending on interpretation.
<i>tarab</i>	A state of ecstasy or enchantment conjured by audience experience of music. Also refers to a repertoire of Arab musicianship based on traditional instruments and compositional forms.

thawri Revolutionary, referencing a genre of music linked to leftist, guerrilla, or militant politics.

turath The heritage, often used in connection to national traditions in music and dance. Also *turathi*, of the heritage.

za'atar Dried Palestinian thyme, mixed with olive oil (*zeit*) as a staple of local cooking.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We also got on the trucks. The glow of emeralds
spoke to us through the night of our olive tree. The barking of
dogs at a fleeting moon over the church tower
But we weren't afraid. Because our children didn't
come with us. A song was enough for us: We'll return
in a little while, to our house . . . when the trucks empty
their extra load!” (Mahmoud Darwish, *Innocent Villagers*, 1995)

Chatting with a Palestinian friend in Manchester on New Year's Eve 2015, we discussed the most recent outbreak of protests and what looked to be a new *Intifada* against the forces of Israeli colonisation across the occupied territories. She showed videos and pictures of her and her friends and family on demonstrations in Jerusalem over the winter break from university and was excited to report of her involvement; she usually stays away. My friend's account of these most recent events depicted the passionate surge of youth taking to the streets, and the role of the young women determined to stand on the frontline. But what surprised me most from this conversation was her insistence that, “This *Intifada* came from music.” One song from a Hamas-linked band, she said, had inspired thousands of youths to take to the streets. *Ukht al-Marjleh* (أخت المرجلة – roughly “sister of strength”) called out to women in particular and was a carefully constructed manifesto for street protest.¹

Later in November 2017, student supporters of the Palestinian cause at the University of Manchester won a mini-victory, as a planned Israeli celebration of the Balfour declaration centenary was cancelled on campus and moved to the Hilton hotel. After marching from the university to the new venue, a guerrilla soundsystem was set up and young Palestinians blasted nationalist songs and danced *dabke* in the street. Protest had created a space for this to happen. Whether or not it is itself a mobilising force for political action, Palestinian music is so diverse, so bound up with transmitting history and so continually relevant to the lives of young and old Palestinians that it can't be ignored. Like the many hurled into a situation of physical defiance

¹ Performed by the group *al-Wafaa'* (“The Faithful”), its singer told the listener that, “your mother”, “your sister”, “your daughter” were on the receiving end of occupation violence and urged the listener to support the “free women of Jerusalem”.

to oppression, the musicians of Palestine are at the centre of a whirlwind. Music matters.

Musicians have been central participants in the life and death struggles of Palestine over its recent and pre-modern histories. Embedded in a population which has faced forced migration, the stories of their performance careers often traverse borders, continents and embody multiple influences. Recounting personal and collective pasts, Palestinian musicians often share commonalities, from the presence of musicians like Lebanese vocalist Fairuz in the soundscapes of their upbringings, or in the political arguments that narrate the contemporary epoch of national struggle. Their music often seeks to give voice to such narratives, embodying *sumud* (“steadfastness”) and resistance as major themes of transmission. Though some have rejected politics, the experience of the Palestinian people appears to block an easy separation.

Conditions of exile, or *ghorba*, have formed a major part of collective memory, whether through Zionist military intervention affecting the locally dispersed, or in events further afield. In Europe, where more recently arrived Palestinian refugees live at the mercy of immigration policies, the Palestinian condition brings the wounds of dispossession and colonialism. Yet, where there are points of unity, Palestinian music also presents differences, suggesting multiple cosmopolitan influences, class backgrounds and upbringings in the lives of generations of exiles in distinctly contrasting locations. The three case studies in this thesis feature: Reem Kelani, a well-known Palestinian singer and broadcaster who grew up in Kuwait and who now lives and performs in London; Saied Silbak, a Palestinian citizen of Israel who plays *oud*² and studied in London at the time of my fieldwork; and Raghda, a Gaza-born woman of working class refugee background who fled to Britain after an Israeli bombing campaign, was held for a period in Yarl’s Wood detention centre, and who sings casually.

This thesis argues that experiences of colonialism and exile shape Palestinian music-making, with cosmopolitan repertoires shaping visions of how a Palestinian narrative can and should be transmitted. It interrogates the spaces, opportunities and barriers to success for Palestinian music in exile, examining the socio-musical upbringing of the three musicians in Kuwait, Shefa‘amr (a small Palestinian city east of Haifa), the Gaza Strip and Britain. Gravitating towards the ethnomusicological theme of transmission, I explore the role of musical narratives

² A short-necked, unfretted plucked string instrument popular across the Arab world, Iran, Turkey, Greece and a handful of other countries.

as offering a window to transmit memories of exile and displacement. Moreover, through the struggles over both artistic direction and spaces to perform, Palestinian musicians explore alternatives to occupation, collusion and marginalisation.

The snapshot offered at the beginning of this chapter hints at the ‘global’ character of Palestinian existence, as experiences travel with people and stories are told in lands far from Palestine. For Palestinians around the world, lives in exile or away from home are extremely varied, shaped by the economic, political and cultural phenomena of different times and places. (Suleiman 2018; Abu Sitta 2016) In lives of the three musicians discussed in this thesis, particular life stories, upbringings and locations have influenced artistic decisions, views of the world and narratives of past and present. Initially, some of the things that unite them were major factors in my decision to approach them for this study: Reem, Saied and Raghda are all Palestinian, all perform music, and all lived in Britain during my period of research; not unusually, they are all also from families displaced during the ethnic cleansing of Palestine by Zionist forces in 1948.

In my early encounters with Palestinian musicians, it seemed clear that there were many approaches at play, ranging from dedication to rurally inspired *turathi* (“heritage” or folk) music to rap music. Content and meaning also ranged from revolutionary protest song to the seemingly apolitical,³ and friends who listened to nationalist anthems in some circumstances would later go to British nightclubs and dance to Western pop. For Reem, Saied and Raghda, the points of unity do not end with those mentioned above, and often extend to the musical and political. But delving deeper into their artistic involvements, approaches and visions, it became clearer to me how different they were from each other musically and experientially. Like my nightclubbing friends, their tastes were many-layered, differentiated and “global”. Moreover, as musicians, their upbringings in Kuwait, Shafa’amr and Gaza had led them to embrace cosmopolitan approaches which were distinct from each other.

³ The apparent distancing of some Palestinian musicians from political approaches has not prevented their careers from being interpolated as such. An example is the British Home Office’s detention and denial of a visa for solo *oud* (lute) performer Nizar Rohana, due to perform in London in July 2016. In the normalisation of coercive police-state border systems, or the domestic wing of the “War on Terror” in Europe and the US, many are unable to escape designation as Muslims or outsiders. (Khalili 2016; Jameson 2015)

Introducing his work on Jordan, Massad draws on Chatterjee's critique of Anderson's *Imagined Communities*,⁴ echoing Chatterjee's view that the nationalists of colonised nations are agents in the construction of national culture (or for Chatterjee, the "spiritual" domain). Massad argues that this process in itself lacks sovereignty from the machinations of the colonial state:

"Colonial economic relations, the military, colonial schools, law, are in fact repressive of a range of cultural material and productive of another. Nationalists later adopt the colonial cultural product as "traditional," with no reference to its colonial genealogy of repression and production. From repressing existing cultural practices to producing "traditional national" dishes and music, clothes, personal grooming, flags, and sports, colonial institutions are central." (2001, 7)

Massad's focus is on how colonial state bodies of law and the military play both a repressive and productive role in the formation of postcolonial national identity and culture.⁵ I suggest that this dual role impacts broader processes in social and political life under colonial relations and, as indicated in the cases I present, remodels the way Palestinian music is thought of and developed. Moreover, as Marx saw that through conditions of exploitation, capitalism creates its own gravediggers, situations of oppression likewise foster other acts of liberation.⁶ Building on Massad's premise, and on Marx's view that, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (1846), I argue that while forms of musical transmission are repressed in the Palestinian case, whether under Israeli rule, or under exilic conditions shaped differently by colonialism, Palestinian musicians nevertheless find ways of transmitting narratives of *sumud* (steadfastness) and resistance, utilising a range of cosmopolitan approaches at their disposal.

From the themes outlined above and more thoroughly detailed in this and the following chapter, I approach the case studies by asking broadly: do narratives through music, or narratives *of* music, necessarily become narratives that move away from music? The thesis interrogates the

⁴ Chatterjee criticises Anderson for seeing national formulations in colonial countries as "modular" imitations of nationalism in Europe and the Americas, arguing that it is in the "spiritual" realm that Asian and African nationalists are most imaginative. (1993)

⁵ Jordanian national identity is seen as "living testament" to the juridical-military regime introduced by British colonialism (Massad 2001, 162); the resistance to colonial discipline after the Palestine War of 1948 was "crushed" and opposition "reformulated by the state" to serve the post-colonial ruling class. (2001, 198)

⁶ I borrow this phrase from Bertolt Brecht who, in his contribution to debates on expressionist literature, argued that "acts of liberation should always be taken seriously... self-liberation from constructing rules, old regulations which have become fetters." (1980, 73-74)

conditions under which the transmission of Palestinian musical narratives takes place, looking in particular at the cosmopolitan colonial relations that produce or inhibit its development. I argue that the form and presentation of the music is itself shaped by particular conditions of exile or displacement, and ask the questions: How do Palestinian musicians respond to colonialism in exile? What are the barriers and enablers of success? And what form do Palestinian narratives take in performing musicianship in these locations?

The remainder of this introductory chapter consists of three sections: a capsule history of the Palestinian situation, defining key periods, events and other information necessary to provide context to the case studies; a review of literature produced by scholars of Palestinian music; and finally, an overview of the key debates and theoretical questions shaping concepts of cosmopolitanism and Palestinian narratives in and beyond the field of music over recent decades. In Chapter 2 I will set the main questions of this thesis within the fields of ethnomusicology and Palestine studies, and expand on my methodological approach.

1.1 The historical background

The 20th Century history of Palestine and the “Palestinian-Israeli conflict” are the subjects of countless monographs, essays, oral histories, articles, political treatises and other works, scholarly and otherwise.⁷ Some have reached back further to document Palestinian existence prior to the modern era, implicitly or explicitly challenging colonialist accounts seeking to tie the Jewish people to the land long before the 19th Century birth of modern political Zionism. (Masalha 2018; Sand 2012) In this section I offer a brief chronology of the key events anchoring the narratives of the musicians in this thesis in order to index the range of historic terms and moments referred to in subsequent chapters.

Nearly four centuries of Ottoman rule over Palestine, Lebanon and other Arab lands came to an end with the empire’s defeat during the First World War. Britain and France quickly seized on the political and military weakness of the Ottoman government and, by May 1916, had connived on a secret plan for a post-war carving up of the Ottoman Empire in the event of an

⁷ The main historic texts that I draw on for this section include Fisk (1990; 2005), Hirst (2003), Khalidi (1992), Masalha (2005; 2018), Pappé (2006) and Sayigh (2007).

allied victory. (Cronin 2017) The Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 set out a post-war blueprint for British and French control of the Middle East. While Iraq and Syria would be directly colonised, plans for Palestine, ostensibly under a British-dominated “international zone,” were to formalise the British government’s support for Zionism, with catastrophic results for the native Palestinian Arab population.

By the 20th Century, Zionism was already well established as a political trend in the centres of European power and the colonisation of Palestine by wealthy Zionists had already begun. A movement based on the outright denial of the rights of Palestinians and a biblically-justified claim to the land as a Jewish state (Massad 2006; Sand 2012), what it had lacked so far was an imperial sponsor. Theodore Herzl, seen as the founding father of modern Zionism, called the project “a colonial idea” which “should be easily understood” by the British (Rose 1986), while future President of Israel Chaim Weizmann promised that the Zionists would “carry culture to the east”, “bring back civilisation” to Palestine, and enable European profits. (Scholtes 2015)

For their part, British politicians were motivated by threats to British rule in North Africa and Asia and later by the influence of the Bolshevik revolution on anti-colonial movements in the Arab world.⁸ British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour requested that Weizmann and Zionist Federation leader Lord Rothschild draft a statement that the cabinet would then approve and send in a 2 November 1917 letter. The infamous Balfour Declaration promised “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” Native Palestinians, many of whom took to the streets in protest at the news, were of no concern.⁹ The British Mandate,

⁸ The war had also ushered in an era of anti-imperialist rebellion and, particularly in Russia, movements for socialist revolution. Britain's position in Egypt, India, Ireland and other territories was under threat from rising nationalist insurgencies. Gerald Maurice, the First Secretary of Constantinople, warned of a “prairie fire” reaching Egypt. (Khalidi 1980, 246) Consideration of these revolutionary and nationalist threats to British imperialism were a crucial part of the agreement with France. To Mark Sykes:

“it was clear . . . that an Arab rising was sooner or later to take place, and that the French and ourselves ought to be on better terms if the rising was not to be a curse instead of a blessing...” (Said 2003, 221)

Sir Ronald Storrs was appointed governor of Jerusalem and was frank in declaring Britain's true motives. The colonisation of Palestine, he said,

“will form for England, a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism.” (Abrahams 1994)

⁹ Clarifying the position, Balfour wrote to Lord Curzon:

“in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country....The Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far

which occupied Palestine militarily from 1917, would supervise Zionist colonisation in the decades to follow, with a regime setting the stage for an exclusively Jewish state.¹⁰

By the 1930s, Palestinian nationalist protest against Zionism and the British occupation had reached insurrectionary levels, in what Rosemary Sayigh highlights as “the most sustained phase of militant anti-imperialist struggle in the Arab world before the Algerian War of Independence.” (Sayigh 2007, 43; Kanafani 1972) The 1936-39 Palestinian Rebellion explicitly demanded Palestinian independence and a representative national assembly, an end to the sale of Arab land to Zionists and the prohibition of Zionist settlement. On the heels of a wave of smaller disturbances and strikes, the uprising was met with extreme repression from the British regime, implementing house demolitions, raids, summary executions, checkpoints, walls, barbed wire border fences, arrests, internment, ID cards, destruction of food and harvests. Over 5,000 Palestinians were killed as British forces trained and collaborated with Zionist paramilitaries, fatally weakening the anti-colonial movement in the period prior to the catastrophe that followed. (Khalili 2010; Swedenburg 1995)

In 1947, the Jewish population in Palestine was still a minority and consisted of around a third of the total population; by 1948, Zionist organisations and settlers had been able to purchase no more than 7% of Palestinian land. (Farsoun 2004, 13) The situation would change rapidly. By the time of Britain’s official disengagement from Palestine in May 1948, around 400,000 Palestinians had already been expelled from their homeland and 225 population centres had been forcibly evacuated. The Zionist paramilitary forces that terrorised villages and carried out horrific massacres at Deir Yassin and al-Dawamiya¹¹ would form the basis of the military apparatus of the Israeli state. Around 800,000 Palestinians were expelled during the 1948 *Nakba* (“catastrophe”). (Pappé 2006; Khalidi 1992)

Scattered to the winds, many faced proletarianisation in host countries (Farsoun 2004) as Palestinians faced challenges ranging from military rule for those who had remained within the

profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.” (Abrahams 1994)

¹⁰ Among other measures, the British occupation printed a currency with Hebrew text reading “Land of Israel” and imposed demographic separation along sectarian lines in Jerusalem. (Tamari 2013)

¹¹ On 9 April 1948, Zionist Irgun and Lehi militias laid siege to the village of Deir Yassin near Jerusalem, brutally murdering over one hundred of its inhabitants, mostly women and children, with gunfire, daggers, and axes. (Hirst 2003; Pappé 2006) In October, 80-100 Palestinians were similarly butchered at al-Dawamiya in the Hebron mountains. (Black 2017)

Israeli state's borders; being refugees on their country, in the West Bank and Gaza; an insecure relationship with often hostile hosts as in Jordan and Lebanon; or varying levels of tolerance and exploitation as migrant workers in the Gulf. (Ghabra 1988) As a bulwark against Arab anti-colonialism, Israel's regional confrontations came to a head in the "six day war" of 1967 and its conquest of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Egyptian Sinai and Syrian Golan Heights. In the repression of the *Naksa* ("the setback"), 320,000 Palestinians were forced to flee in 1967 alone; between June 1967 and December 1986, 655,000 were forced to migrate by Israeli deportations, internal repression and restrictions on residency. (Kossaifi 1996) The October 1973 war with Egypt solidified Israeli control of captured territory and ensured the flow of US weapons to the Zionist state. (Hirst 2003; Khalidi 2013, 204)

The 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a reorganisation of Palestinian political forces in exile. A Palestinian Revolution (*thawra*) was declared as political parties proliferated and formed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). Carrying out guerrilla attacks, building up ideological and cultural material and commemorating Palestinian history in the refugee camps were all part of the new movement. (Sayigh 2007) Israeli invasions of Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s aimed at crushing Palestinian "terrorism" and brought fascist brutality to the camps, notably with the slaughter of up to 3,500 civilians at Sabra and Shatila.¹² Within 40 years of the *Nakba*, only 40.7% of Palestinians remained in historic Palestine, with the majority of others remaining in refugee camps in neighbouring countries. (Said 1986)

By the mid-1980s, new forces had emerged, born of youth frustration at repression, poverty and life under occupation. On 8 December 1987, four day-labourers were killed as an Israeli truck ran into them on their way home to Gaza, igniting an *Intifada* (uprising, lit. "shuddering") that would last five years; a key cause was the presence of 115,000 armed settlers on land captured in 1967. (Hirst 2003; 221; Fisk 2005, 900). The *Intifada* was a largely unarmed grassroots movement based on camp dwelling refugees, and inspired new forms of struggle and community organisation. Palestinian exile communities across the Middle East and internationally played a part in mobilising solidarity and much needed fundraising. While the

¹² During the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in September 1982, Israeli defence minister Ariel Sharon and army chief of staff Raphael Eitan sent Israel's Phalangist allies into the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut to destroy "terrorists". Between 16-18 September, Christian Phalange (Kata'ib) militia members carried out a sustained massacre of up to 3,500 people, slaughtering pregnant women, children and the elderly. (Siegel 2001; Fisk 1990)

period also saw the rise of conservative Islamist trends, the leading role of women in organising social and political action has also noted by numerous authors. (Sabbagh 1998; Massad 2006)

This burgeoning challenge the Zionist state and to obstacles to women's participation (Darraj 2014) hit a roadblock with the 1993 Oslo accords, signified by PLO leader Yasser Arafat (Abu Ammar) shaking hands with US president Clinton and Israeli leader Yitzak Rabin on the White House Lawn.¹³ In return for an eventual Palestinian state, the document required the Palestinian leaders to renounce violence – but made no such demands on Israel. Israel's colonial settlements were not mentioned at all. Neither were the Palestinians in the *dakhil* ("inside" the Israeli state)¹⁴, who had played an active role in the *Intifada*, but were ignored in favour of a vision of two "states", based on pre-1967 borders. The refugees, then over 3.5 million, and the status of Jerusalem, were relegated to "final status" negotiations that would never take place. By signing, the PLO leaders renounced a plethora of UN resolutions; 100,000 Palestinians were able to return to the West Bank or Gaza as part of negotiations, and a Palestinian Authority (PA) was be set up.

Massad traces the official change to the PLO position which had taken shape in the 1988 Declaration of Independence, which made no mention of diaspora or "Israeli Palestinians", stating only that independence would consist of a "state of Palestinians wherever they may be..." (2001b); the change in reality happened "as early as 1974". Through an ongoing process based on maintaining its class privileges over the interests of the mass of Palestinians, the PA came to play the role of "Israel's enforcer" (Said 1993), with EU funding for a security regime which includes Jericho prison and which collaborated with Israeli state repression. (Barghouti 2017)

Fisk writes that, even if Oslo had "worked", it "would have given the Palestinians a mere 64 per cent of the 22 per cent of Mandate Palestine that was left to negotiate over." (2005, 938) During the years of the "peace process" that followed, settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem increased from 247,000 to 375,000 (Finkelstein 2005, 104); Palestinians continued

¹³ In *The Morning After*, Said reflects on the "truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation", a "Palestinian Versailles", where, for one thing, "the domination (if not the outright theft) of land and water resources is either overlooked, in the case of water, or, in the case of land, postponed by the Oslo accord." (1993)

¹⁴ In this thesis, the terms *dakhil* and '48 Palestine are used interchangeably to describe the portion of land inside the "green line" demarcating the Israeli state.

to face administrative detention (imprisonment without charge or trial) with impunity. These conditions, alongside continual and bloody Israeli military incursions and the spiralling poverty that marked Oslo's failure led to the Second "Al-Aqsa" *Intifada* in 2000, provoked by "butcher of Beirut," by this point Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, marching on the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. This uprising carried many of the hallmarks of the first *Intifada* street movement with, for a period, the intensified involvement of the armed wings of Palestinian resistance factions. (Baroud 2009) The UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs reported that 4,228 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces over the next 7 years.

The years since Oslo have seen more attempts at resuscitating negotiations by various US presidents and EU leaders. Israel has launched multiple heavy bombing campaigns on Gaza,¹⁵ Lebanon (Hirst 2011) and Syria, continual arrests and military attacks in the occupied West Bank, and continues to build colonial settlements on the West Bank and Jerusalem; many Palestinians in the *dakhil* also face house demolitions and displacement. The PA, under Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas, ostensibly controls the West Bank, while a Hamas administration has governed the Gaza Strip since winning fraught elections in 2006. At the time of writing, a weekly March of Return takes place in Gaza, protesting against the blockade which severely restricts movement, water, electricity, medicine and food supplies, with the UN reporting an "unlivable" humanitarian situation. (UN 2017).

1.2 Palestinian music: a literature review

In this short survey, I trace what I see as the key developments and trends in the study of Palestinian music since the *Nakba*. The aim here is not to give an extensive history, but to provide context for the thesis focus on colonialism, cosmopolitanism and nationalist transmission. Beginning by noting a particular area of research which looks to document traditions existing before the Zionist ethnic cleansing operations of 1948, I recognise that non-Palestinian ethnomusicologists are latecomers to a research field pioneered by Palestinian musicians, folklorists, activists and academics. From a review of this *turath* (heritage)-based material, I chart several recent trends in English-language publications, with reference to the

¹⁵ These include Operation Cast Lead in 2008-09, killing over 1,400 Palestinians and Protective Edge in summer 2014, in which Israel bombed homes, hospitals, mosques and other public buildings in Gaza, killing over 2,000 Palestinians. (Al Haq 2009; OHCHR 2014)

multiple genres and approaches proliferating in Palestinian music.

Since the period of European Orientalist monographs,¹⁶ the study of Palestinian music has been predominantly been carried out by Palestinians. These include many musicians keen to get to grips with their national heritage in order to either preserve tradition or to challenge it in new ways, and folklore enthusiasts concerned with documenting historic Palestine. Poet and scholar Dr Abdelatif al-Bargouthi (1928-2002) from the village of Kafr ‘Ain spent years recording, transcribing and writing about music and folk heritage in Palestine and Jordan,¹⁷ publishing a raft of journal articles, 25 books, and postgraduate theses at Birzeit University and the University of London, on literature, music, education and heritage.¹⁸ From the 1960s, al-Bargouthi’s Arabic language texts include detailed essays on the folk genres of *‘ataaba* (1986), *dal’ouna* (1990) and *zareef el tool* (1980). Primarily poetic forms with no known composer, the songs are set to orally-remembered melodies, usually around repeated *maqam* phrases, with rhyme structures manipulated typically by the *zajjal*.¹⁹ On the *‘ataaba* form alone, al-Bargouthi collected over 2,000 lyric stanzas, focusing noting the particularly village- or region-specific use of Arabic language to describe historic events:

To the country, my people bring a gift

As they will never accept Zionism

شعبي للوطن قدم هديه
ولا يمكن يرضا²⁰ بالصهيونية

Al-Bargouthi argued elsewhere for a shift towards seeing the value of *‘amiyya* (colloquial Arabic) as a focus of study (1990, 11), later tracing the use of political themes in traditional song forms during the *Intifada*. (Al-Bargouthi 1998)

¹⁶ Beckles Willson records the missionaries’ attempts at collecting Palestinian songs, including the 1901 *Palastinischer Diwan*, collected and edited by German theologian and linguist Gustav Dalman. (2014)

¹⁷ I am grateful to my friend Mohammad Daghray, a relative of al-Bargouthi, for providing biographical information.

¹⁸ He also published historical material Libya, where he was stationed while working for UNESCO in the mid 1970s.

¹⁹ The *zajjal* (plural *zajjaleen*), or poet-singer, is usually associated with traditional Palestinian weddings and public events.

²⁰ Here, the verb for “refuse” (يرضا) is transcribed in a Bedouin dialect where the “Dah” (ضا) sound becomes “Zah” (ظا).

The research of al-Bargouthi, certainly the most prolific of researchers on Palestinian music, may now be seen as part of a wider folklorist trend, emerging in earnest after the Palestinian revolution of the 1960s. This work ranged from collections of the lyrics of liberation songs produced in the resurgent national movement of the 1960s and in the *Intifada* (Sbait 1970), fieldwork carried out among Palestinian refugees in Jordan (Al-'Asadi 1976), analyses of orientalism and Zionism in regards to Palestinian folk song (Haddad 1991; 1994), and a continued focus on documenting specific song forms such as the *Zareef al-Tool*. (Khoury 1999) A large body of mostly Arabic-language work was built up documenting the wedding traditions of historic Palestine, looking at the role of women-centred songs (Libbis 1989; Younis 2001), and the “debates” present in sung *hida*²¹ poetry, which Sbait lists as ranging from “praise; politics; love; description of the occasion; and social, educational, and intellectual issues.” (1993) This description could be applied to Palestinian music more generally, and hints at the multiple musical approaches that have taken shape at various moments.

Motivations for this research differed but took place as broader trends developed in Palestinian public spheres in the homeland and *ghorba*, towards reclaiming, documenting or preserving the artefacts of a social life violently interrupted by Zionist colonisation (see Chapter 2). Musicians were central to a process of defining and appropriating the *turath al-sha'bi* (popular heritage) as many artists sought to channel tradition²² into practical performance, with a particular trend developing towards folklore. In the 1970s and 1980s popular singers such as Abu 'Arab, Mustafa al-Kurd and the band Al-'Ashiqeen sought to provide musical history lessons (see Chapter 7) or chronicle present day Palestinian struggles through the use of folk forms and regionally specific *maqamat*.²³ Musicians leading the arts troupe Firqat El-Funoon el-Sha'bia (“the popular arts band”; often shortened by the group to El-Funoon, “the arts”) performed, for the most part, on traditional instruments such as the *buzuq*²⁴, *mijwiz*²⁵ and

²¹ This form is defined by improvised sung poetry, usually between one *hadi* poet singer and a large crowd, using call-and-response techniques. See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion on the role of the *hadi* in Palestinian weddings.

²² I use this term with caution. Discussing anti-colonial nationalism, Massad writes that the assertion of traditional national culture is a key aim, adding that the presentation of a range of cultural forms is often “not so much traditional” as “*traditionalized*”. (2006, 42; 2001, 6)

²³ The plural of *maqam*, or musical scale. *Maqamat* associated with Palestine or *Bilad al-Sham* (adding Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) include *bayat*, *kurd* and *rast*.

²⁴ A long-necked string instrument related to the Turkish *saz* and the Greek *bouzouki*.

²⁵ A small, double-reed wind instrument.

*shabbabeh*²⁶ and, as the liner notes to their album *Zaghareed* reveal:

“Their early works were the result of extensive research in Palestinian villages, preserving centuries-old songs and dances such as the *dabke*, a traditional dance for popular among the Arabs of the Eastern Mediterranean that uses the *oud*, *nay*, and other regional folk instruments.” (1999)

The band is credited as being a founding partner of Al-Bireh Popular Arts Centre in Ramallah, which has played a leading role in documenting musical material from Palestine's folk history.²⁷

While stylistically different to the arts troupe model²⁸ of El-Funoon, singers such as Ibrahim Sbehat, Maher Halabi and the late Shafiq Kabha are also considered to be authorities on folkloric music, having carried out fieldwork of their own to collate and disseminate Palestinian songs, sometimes presenting their interpretations alongside revolutionary politics.²⁹ Their post-Oslo era soundworld is electro-acoustic, using electronic or programmed drumbeats, guitars and virtuoso keyboards, alongside *shabbabeh*, percussion and, sometimes, *oud*; the style is sometimes referred to as “*mijwiz* music” by young Palestinians, for its keyboard imitation of the traditional reed instrument.³⁰ The lyrical content of the electro-traditional trend is strongly nationalistic, sometimes placing gathered lyrics beside new verses by the vocalist or band leader. *Zareef el-Tool* (A Tall Handsome Man) is a song of unknown authorship and tells the story of a Palestinian forced into exile (*ghorba*), traditionally sang from the first person perspective of somebody who has stayed behind. As in many Palestinian songs, the *zareef* form follows a melodic and rhyming structure, but the lyrics are changed by the singer – traditionally known as the *zajjal*, with reference to the archetypal bard of historic Palestine. Folklorist Bashar Bargouthi documents for following lyrics³¹:

²⁶ An end-blown reed flute.

²⁷ I visited the centre without an appointment in August 2013, with little in the way of Arabic language skill and was overwhelmed by the vast collection of CDs, cassettes and other documentary music footage kept in the archive. A selection of this material has been released by the Popular Arts Centre on the album *Traditional Music and Songs from Palestine*. (1997)

²⁸ Other large ensembles combining music, dance, poetry and embroidery included Firqat (band) al-Markaziya, Firqat Jafra and Firqat Television Falasteen. This model is far from unique to Palestine, with state-supported folkloric troupes active in Syria and Lebanon.

²⁹ Kabha was also an outspoken critic of the Egyptian regime of Hosni Mubarak. He was, according to musician Nizar Rohana, “an icon for many Palestinians and played an important role in preserving and disseminating Palestinian folk tunes”. (Brehony 2013)

³⁰ The work of such artists has clearly influenced Europe-based Palestinian group 47Soul, who take a cue from these predecessors, with keyboard “*mijwiz*” and elements of hip hop and reggae. (Karkabi 2018; Brehony 2015)

³¹ Bashar Bargouthi sees Palestinian bands as “the main source of energy for the revival of our popular songs”, adding that:

O, *zareef el-Tool*, stop so I can tell you
You are going abroad but your country is better for you
I am afraid you will get established there
And find someone else and forget me

يا زريف الطول وقف تا قللك
رايح عالغريه وبلادك احسن لك
خايف يا زريف تروح تتملك
وتعاشير الغير وتنساني انا³²

These lyrics are reproduced word-for-word in El-Funoun's performance of the song. In contrast to the above verse, which is a pleads to its subject not to leave, folklore singer Ibrahim Sbehat's past tense lyrics evoke a different time, conjuring up nostalgic images of the land that the *zareef* has left.³³

Ya *zareef el-tool* he left his land and went
Without Palestine his heart will never rest
Oh smell of my country, oh the perfume's aroma
Precious to us, the soil of our country

يا زريف الطول صوب بلادو راح
غير بفلسطين قلبو ما يرتاح
يا ريحة لبلاد يا عطر الفواح
غالي علينا يا تراب بلادنا

Musically, Sbehat's offering of *Zareef el-Tool* is an expansive *dabke* arrangement with long passages of keyboard improvisation on the song's theme.

"All occasions in the Palestinian life have their own songs. Weddings are the most popular times when people sing and dance on the tunes of the popular songs. Usually there are certain singers (*Zajjaleen*) who lead the singing and the audience repeats after them. However, one can find people singing popular songs while working in the land or the factory. As any other form of poetry, popular songs treat different aspects: love, patriotism, wisdom, and others. In addition, there are different forms of songs which differ in the tune and the way of singing as will be seen below. Most of the songs introduced in this section are men's songs in addition to the most popular women's song (*Zaghareet*). However, this does not mean that women do not contribute to the Palestinian folklore... Eventhough [sic] these are men's songs, women may also use the same forms where they may change the tune or the contents of the songs." (Bargouthi.com, date unknown)

³² I have kept Bargouthi's transcription in tact here; his Arabic spellings are modelled on Palestinian spoken dialect rather than strictly 'correct' classical language. Thus زريف ("zareef" - "handsome one") becomes زريف with a 'soft' opening consonant, and the word حتى ("hatta" - "so that...") is shortened to a single ت ("ta").

³³ The recording was apparently made in 2012 and exists in different forms online.

The 1980s folklore revival coincided the emergence of new bands and musicians, who, while they were themselves involved in researching material linked to the *turath*, sought to stretch the limits of musical artistry. The Jerusalem-based group Sabreen collaborated with activist-poets and built a sound influenced by Arabic classical music, Palestinian folklore, jazz, European pop and folk (Boulos 2013), performing to university crowds and international audiences; Sabreen's commitment to formal and informal music learning later developing into an association for artistic development. By the *Intifada*, a Palestinian scene comprising *turathi* material, *oud*-based protest song and cosmopolitan pop suggested that categories would not be easily defined, as bands known for avant-garde approaches also included nationalist anthems in their sets. Reem Talhami was at the time lead singer of the group Washem, which mixed Arabic and European instruments, and explains that her concerts would always feature songs from the *turathi* repertoire.³⁴

From the 1980s onwards, new English language texts on Palestinian music were published, and brief articles appeared in two volumes of the *Rough Guide to World Music*. (1994; 1999) In the first of these, British journalist Andy Morgan charts the development of popular song in the years after the first *Intifada*, with reference to trends after 1948, focusing on the popularity of Mustafa al-Kurd, Al-‘Ashiqeen and Sabreen, and the ability of Palestinian music to chronicle international events:

“Heroes and martyrs of the struggle such as the great Arab leader Cheik L'Hezedin el-Kassam, who vowed to be the first to shoot the God of the British colonialists, were lauded in popular song. Even non-Arab figures like Che Guevara became part of the new folklore. Every significant event in the life of post-partition Palestine – the Six Day War, the Yom Kippur offensive, Arafat's speech to the UN in 1974, the belligerence of Saddam Hussein and the Intifada – has at one time or another been celebrated or mourned in song.” (Morgan 1994, 177)

A second article offers a more substantive name-check of Palestinian musicians, yet the chapter is short, comprising less than half the length of the two chapters on Israeli and Jewish music. (Morgan and Adileh 1999) Nevertheless, new ethnomusicological research emerging in the post-Oslo period began to build on the English-language contributions of ethnographers and

³⁴ Interview with Reem Talhami, Jerusalem, August 2013.

political writers, with a number of journal articles and encyclopaedia entries, offering detailed descriptions of traditions in wedding music (Sbait 1993; Yaqub 2007) and on the popular music of the *Intifada*. (Oliver and Steinberg 2002)

A notable subplot in this thesis concerns the contributions of non-Palestinian musicians, many of whom have been adopted as national icons at certain points. In *Liberating Songs: Palestine put to Music* (2003), Massad analyses the history of songs about Palestine from 1948 onwards, looking at the content of musical contributions by Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers,³⁵ the musicians of the Egyptian anti-imperialist trend in the 1950s, and Palestinian songwriters and performers in the years after. Massad points out that,

“While most books dealing with individual singers discuss these singers’ patriotic songs, there has been no major academic engagement with the overall history and role of patriotic, nationalist, and revolutionary songs in the modern Arab world, nor with their role in the Palestine tragedy specifically.” (2003)

Massad has himself addressed specific gaps, here recording vital information on the works of Mohammed Abdel Wahab³⁶ and other Egyptian composers and poets as influences on the resurgent Palestinian nationalist trend in music in the 1960s, an influential current during the early years of Reem Kelani and Raghda in Kuwait and Gaza respectively. Massad describes musical trends following closely the development of the guerrilla struggle in this era:

“The songs of this period concerned the exiled Palestinians and those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. After 1976, however, when the Palestinian Israelis rose up against Israel’s policy of Judaizing the Galilee by confiscating yet more Palestinian land, songs began to embrace them as well.” (2003)

Poems by a new crop of highly influential Palestinian activist-poets, including Mahmoud

³⁵ Assi and Mansour Rahbani were leading composers in Lebanon and formed prolific musical partnership with vocalist Fairuz, whom Assi married in 1955; their son Ziad Rahbani also became a well known composer and musician.

³⁶ An Egyptian composer, musician and filmstar well known for his experimentation with European instruments and later career works for Umm Kulthum.

Darwish and Tawfiq Zayyad formed the lyrics of many singers from Lebanon, keen to support the Palestinian cause. Massad depicts the rise of Palestinian bands El-Funoon and Sabreen in the early 1980s through this cross-play with Palestine's musical neighbours. Care is taken to emphasise the role that this music has played:

“These songs have obviously not brought about the liberation of Palestine and the Palestinians. Nonetheless, the songs both expressed and register the changing dynamics of the Palestinian struggle, reflecting which segment of the Palestinian people is most prominent at the moment and which form of struggle is imagined as most effective.” (Massad 2003)

In 2006, a work by two Israeli academics became, remarkably, the first dedicated book on Palestinian music to be published in English in the modern era. (Cohen and Katz 2006) Focusing entirely on a theoretical modal framework and stylistic aspects of “Arab folk music in Israel”, the work offered detailed technical analysis of a selection of Palestinian music recorded in Galilee in the post-*Nakba* years (not referred to here as such). However, an aim to offer a “comprehensive picture of a musical tradition as an integral part of its culture” falls flat, presenting “Palestinian Arab music” (as opposed to “Palestinian music”) as a tradition divorced from politics and social context, stripped of its positionality within a broader field that includes more open protest music and song. Indeed, throughout the text the authors are at pains to avoid using the word *Palestinian* at all. A focus on tradition is clearly understandable in the Palestinian context and in-depth analysis is certainly necessary, but Cohen and Katz show no signs of even recognising the existence of social or political life.

While many of the musical examples analysed by Cohen and Katz come from the repertoire attached to traditional Palestinian weddings, David McDonald's research shows that:

“Protest songs were sung at weddings as often as wedding songs were sung at protests, if such a distinction could ever be made. Moreover, through analysis of the meanings inherent to this repertory of indigenous song, it was clear that weddings, and their associated roles, practices, and rituals, were closely identified within a broad-based and diffuse notion of “resistance,” defined and articulated in myriad ways, refracted through the prism of class, religion, gender and politics.” (2013, 4)

If Cohen and Katz sought to decontextualise Palestinian music, McDonald's (2013) ethnomusicological contribution would be highly politicised, framing modern Palestinian identities as requiring freedom from the "binaries" of occupation and resistance – problems I will return to below.³⁷ The oral practice of learning songs connected to resistance is documented in particular in McDonald's observation of Palestinian families sharing the song *Yama Mwil al-Hawa* (also sung by Reem Kelani) with their children in the Jordanian village of Umm Qais. Al-'Ashiqeen's version of this famous folk song is analysed through the performance history of the band's *oud* player and composer Adnan Odeh. (2013, 36) Elsewhere in the text McDonald charts the careers of '48 Palestinian rappers DAM, contributing to a growing field of focus among recent ethnomusicologists writing on Palestinian hip-hop. (Rooney 2013; Safieh 2013) Others have reflected on the proliferation of expansive, genre-challenging approaches. Karkabi looks into the alternative scene developed by Palestinians in the *dakhil*, assessing the musical and organisational forms and problems of access faced by electro-*mijwiz*, hip-hop, electronica and rave scenes. (2013; 2018)

Palestinian Music and Song, a collection of short essays by 16 different contributors, brought together, for the first time the broad approaches, musical and analytical, that have shaped understandings of Palestinian musicianship. Its editorial hinted at the multi-faceted approaches that this task engendered:

"The significance of the Palestinian case for musicologists, anthropologists, and political analysts lies in the fact that it provides an outstanding opportunity for a generative analysis of the interactive relationship between music as a form of expressive culture and the use, abuse, and misuse of power, externally as well as internally. On the one hand, Palestinians share the same discourses and sociocultural, political, and economic characteristics of all the deprived, oppressed, and marginalized peoples of the third world, whether in Asia, Africa, Latin America,

³⁷ In particular, McDonald "shudders" at the thought that the Second *Intifada* should be thought of as a popular protest movement (2013, 1) as it lacked the "non-violent" quality of the first uprising. This sets the tone for a narrative in which he rejects nationalist music as beset by "clichés" and "machinations", as anathema to truly counterhegemonic art. (2013, 26) Baroud sees the Al-Aqsa Intifada differently:

"[Israel's] ultimate aim has been the expropriation of Palestinian land in the Occupied Territories of the 1967 borders. Being pushed to the brink, Palestinians resisted, violently and otherwise. Their resistance occasionally produced a campaign of collective action, mostly spontaneous, through often galvanized by local political movements to articulate a well-defined program. Both Palestinian uprisings in 1987 and 2000 articulated a message that largely reflected the political aspirations of most Palestinians toward the creation of a truly sovereign Palestinian state in all territories illegally occupied in 1967..." (2006, 130)

or elsewhere. On the other hand, Palestinians are a unique case in that while the rest of the world has moved to the postcolonial condition and seemingly have a long way to go in struggling for survival, resisting occupation, and fighting for liberation and national independence.” (Kanaaneh 2013, 2)

While Kurds, Tamils, Irish and other occupied or colonised peoples may disagree with the “postcolonial” aspect of this analysis³⁸, Kanaaneh’s statement on both the connectedness of Palestine to other liberation struggles and the unique qualities of the Palestinian situation rings true. He goes on to describe the dialectical relationship of tradition and engagement with colonialism which has “both strengthened and weakened” Palestinian music, emphasising that cultures develop according to their contact with others. It follows that, “since music is an integral component of culture, music produced under occupation is inevitably music of resistance, whether it is political or not, politicized or not.” (Kanaaneh 2013, 9) The latter description is clearly constructed with those living in Palestine in mind but raises important questions on the nature of music produced by Palestinians *outside* the situation of occupation. In the same volume, Safieh discusses the shared affinities of US-based Palestinian and black youth, arguing that:

“Hop-hop communities in Palestine and the diaspora are actively employing hop-hop simultaneously as a vehicle for asserting their “otherness” as Palestinians and also as a common form of cultural expression and identity.” (2013, 73)

Other contributions point to the breadth of Palestinian music and examine themes such as the political poetics of the Sabreen band (Boulos), Palestinian hip-hop (Safieh; McDonald), and on the contradictions of Western institutional funding. The latter is taken up by Beckles Willson in the context of culturally-focused “coexistence” projects, particularly the Barenboim-led orchestra which, “By apparently smothering the political, they facilitated (political) action.” (2013, 275) Themes of cultural collaboration are connected to an environment in the years after

³⁸ McClintock suggests that the heralding of a “postcolonial” era is “prematurely celebratory”, especially in regards to Palestine. (1992) To Shohat, “The ‘post-colonial’ inadvertently glosses over the fact that global hegemony, even in the post-cold war era, persists in forms other than overt colonial rule. As a signifier of a new historical epoch, the term ‘post-colonial,’ when compared with neo-colonialism, comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power relations; it lacks a political content which can account for the eighties and nineties-style U.S. militaristic involvements in Granada, Panama, and Kuwait-Iraq, and for the symbiotic links between U.S. political and economic interests and those of local elites.” (1992)

the Oslo Accords, characterised by the NGOisation of the West Bank with EU/US money³⁹ and the enrichment of the PA-led elite. (Beckles Willson 2014, 228; Massad 2006) El-Ghadban and Strohm conclude that, in the formation of the PA following Oslo, “Two agendas were at work: economic development and state building by enforcing the role of NGOs as active partners in reinscribing the already existent Palestinian civil society networks within the parameters of a state-in-the-making.” (2013, 187)

Bursheh’s interview with researcher Nader Jalal and musician Issa Boulos reveals a number of significant topics in the heritage of Palestinian music, including: the history of folkloric music which, according to Boulos, was not restricted to rural areas; on the social function of songs in work and social life; important figures in the music scene in the first half of the 21st Century; the role of Palestinian cities such as Jerusalem, Haifa and Yafa as cultural and economic centres; the cosmopolitanism of Jerusalem and influence of the Armenian community among others; and the catastrophic effects of the British Mandate and Zionist colonisation. (Bursheh 2013) Many of these observations are confirmed in the memoirs of musician and socialite Wasif Jawhariyyeh, adding weight to the idea that Jerusalem was, long before the British mandate, a location of diverse public cultures, in turn impacting the development of Palestinian music. (Tamari 2005; Tamari and Nassar 2014)

The pre-Nakba period was, according to Jalal, a moment of intense musical activity as the political awakening of the Palestinian movement took revolutionary forms in the face of a hostile colonialist regime:

“Popular songs began with the nationalist revolution... before that we didn’t know the names of who wrote the music. When the Zionist Jews began to emigrate to Palestine, we started to make more music... There were songs against Zionist immigration. Songs started to talk about the Balfour Declaration. In 1936 they started to sing about the six-month strike. In 1948 they sang about the *Nakba*. In 1956 they sang about Britain and Israel's war against Egypt. We’re

³⁹ Abbas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) have the political and financial support of the European Union and US. In 2007 the Paris Donor Conference of the world’s wealthiest nations bypassed the elected Hamas government to pledge \$7.7 billion to the PA. (Pleming and Haddadin, 2008) In May 2013, the EU gave the PA nearly €20 million to pay salaries and pensions – there have been recent strikes over austerity in the West Bank and its international backers are keen to prevent a political crisis; 28% of the PA budget is reserved for its security forces. (Middle East Monitor, 14/4/15) A flip side is the dire situation described by Raghda before she left Gaza, with little opportunity, crisis-levels of social provision and routine Israeli bombing campaigns (Chapter 8).

just talking about the subject, the words, what the songs were about. In 1965 they began to sing about the Fedayeen and the PLO. In 1967 they sang about the war between Egypt, Syria and Israel. In the 1980s they started to write words about the Fedayeen in Lebanon and in 1987 about the First *Intifada*.”

“Besides the national subjects, social subjects kept on. We used to talk about love, social life, work. We’re talking about traditional music and popular songs. After 1936 they started to use non-traditional musical instruments... like *oud*, violin, *nai*, and so on.”⁴⁰

Jalal has led the Ramallah-based Nawa association in uncovering information and music related to 62 performers active in the years 1936-48, much of the work involving visits to Syria and the wider Arab world to find scores or interview former students and musicians. Highlighting ongoing relationships between research and Palestinian musicianship, Nawa has enabled the lost works of Rawhi al-Khammash (1923-1998) to be reproduced in new concerts in historic Palestine in performances by young musicians. I will return to discussions on the relationship between music, politics and questions of *turath* in the chapter that follows. As I will explain in the Methodology, I see the ongoing movement to document historic Palestine as raising questions on the relationship between ethnography and advocacy, sharing Sayigh’s (2011) belief that research can offer tools for community self-determination, relating to ongoing debates in ethnomusicology. (Seeger 2008; Barz 2008)

A further point of interest is that much of the music excavated by Nawa is without lyrics, highlighting the new meanings taken on by instrumentalism in the context of lives shaped by colonialism, and an ongoing Palestinian liberation struggle. Noting a renaissance in popularity of *oud* performers, Wong sees arguments for alternative futures being posed by many young instrumentalists in embracing expansive definitions of Palestinian music. (2009) I add that the multiplicity of musical influences present in Palestinian styles, whether electro or traditionalised, carry the cosmopolitan tendencies of earlier periods, as suggested in the contributions on pre-1948 Palestine discussed above. The next section will set examine concepts of cosmopolitanism, setting the backdrop to discussions on Palestine within questions of global and local power relations.

⁴⁰ Interview with Nader Jalal, Ramallah, August 2018.

1.3 Music, cosmopolitanism and Palestinian narratives

“From folklore to festivals, household gatherings to major stars performing at large venues, Palestine before the Nakba was clearly on par musically and culturally with its neighbors and perhaps surpassed some of them in terms of its cosmopolitanism.” (Bursheh 2013)

“It wasn’t Palestinian [music] actually. Marcel Khalife, Julia Boutros, Umm Kulthum... People who were singing about their countries.⁴¹ And Samih Shuqeir, a Syrian. And at the time we thought those people had Palestinian roots, because they were singing to Palestine as their country.” - Raghda

The earliest childhood performance opportunities recalled by Reem, Saied and Raghda display a panorama of musical relationships, forming repertoires and soundscapes that point to the wider listening habits of Palestinian groups in multiple locations. All three, in one way or another, were exposed to “folkloric” song forms linked traditionally to the archetypal Palestinian wedding⁴² or to political storytelling. All accessed the Arabic high art music emanating from the metropolises of Cairo, Beirut and Damascus; Reem and Raghda both recall thinking that Fairuz was Palestinian, with music performance and pro-Palestine content often interlinked. Beyond these commonalities, European and US pop, jazz, classical and stage musics beamed in to varying degrees, forms and social contexts in Kuwait, Shefa’amr and Gaza, sometimes dominant in community life, with Palestinian nationalist songs resurging in periods of intensified political activity.⁴³ They report how, as youngsters, distinctions seemed impossible to identify as these multifarious musics resounded side by side.

While some Palestinian musicians are hailed for their skills at preserving a national heritage rather than for introducing “outside” innovations,⁴⁴ the notion of a longstanding cosmopolitanism is a key descriptor in memories of historic Palestine. (Masalha 2018;

⁴¹ Marcel Khalife is a Lebanese composer and musician famous for his setting to music of the poetry of Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish. Julia Boutros is a Lebanese vocalist with a number of songs referencing Palestinian and Lebanese struggles against Zionism, within a repertoire of Arabic pop music. Samih Shuqeir is a Syrian vocalist and musician also known for singing political anthems. Chapter 7 explores their work.

⁴² This model is depicted in the work of El-Funoon, with chronologies of songs traditionally used for shaving the groom, applying henna to the bride’s forearms or others sung by the congregation. Palestinian weddings customarily take place over several days and distinct stages, as explained in Reem Kelani’s account (Chapter 4).

⁴³ Indian Bollywood film and music is also popular among Palestinian families and, although not explored here, was present in the background in Raghda’s household.

⁴⁴ Composer Said Murad hailed the late wedding singer and folklorist Shafiq Kabha in similar terms following his passing. (Brehony 2013)

Kanaaneh 2013; Jayyusi 2015) Proponents of pre-1948 narratives, not excluding those explored in this thesis, frequently present Palestine's urban centres as multiconfessional melting pots of peaceful coexistence and community cohesion. In the first half of the 20th Century the Palestinian cities of Jerusalem, Haifa and Yafa remained cultural and economic centres, with Umm Kalthum⁴⁵ and other prominent figures visiting to perform. (Massad 2005) The memoirs of Jawharriyeh note the particular cosmopolitanism of Jerusalem, with influential Armenian, Greek and Moroccan communities among others; segregation on confessional lines came with the British Mandate occupation. (Tamari 2014; 2005)

Originating from the Ancient Greek definitions of *kosmos* (world or universe) and *politês* (citizen or "of the city"), cosmopolitanism was conceptualised in relation to society and philosophy long before its introduction to modern ethnomusicological discussion. For German idealist philosopher Kant, it represented an ethical principle which could be implemented as a world order for peace between nations. (1784) Though traces of cosmopolitan thought could later be seen in the works of Marx and Engels,⁴⁶ Bellamy Foster points out they rejected cosmopolitanism as a political category, "in the sense of jumping immediately to the cause of universal humanity within all nations and neglecting the necessity of struggle on national terrains." (2000) More recent use of the term has ranged from the descriptive to the highly conceptual: in the field of ethnomusicology, cosmopolitanism is often used either in passing or as part of a politico-cultural theory, taking in discussions over globalisation, hybridity and diaspora among other issues. I will briefly outline how cosmopolitanism is defined in relation to music and in its broader connotations. Relevant questions include whether the term itself is problematic or the 'best of a bad bunch' of descriptors when it comes to cultural multiplicity. In reviewing academic debate, I will also consider cosmopolitanism as existing in plural forms and motivations.

1990s arguments over globalisation revolved around questions of its perceived social transformations, with a focus on what had changed, when, and in whose benefit. Integral to this debate were ideas of "globalising" cultural, economic and political flows and transnational interconnectedness, often referencing cosmopolitan tendencies in media and culture.

⁴⁵ Umm Kalthum was an Egyptian vocalist and perhaps the most famous of Arab musicians. (Danielson 1997)

⁴⁶ The *Communist Manifesto* observes that "The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country." (1848) Its famous concluding slogan, "Workers of the world unite!", pointed to a struggle that transcended nationality, yet their work did not preclude supporting distinctly national struggles, notably the Irish Fenian movement. (Reed 1984)

Arguments about music are bound with metaphors about the world and discussions of trends in contemporary music making have been interwoven with political argument. For Earlmann, world music and “colonial modernity” represented a totalising, top-down imposition by the forces of globalising capital, promoting the orderly consumption of difference. (1994, 1999) In an opposing view, Slobin argued that the status quo was much more anarchic and difficult to pin down. Seeing “no overall sense to the system” Slobin sees a process of deterritorialisation taking place in an increasingly unstable world. (1993) This view chimes with Appadurai’s descriptions of cosmopolitan cultural flows competing with or superseding national culture (1990), as the “great power” (1991) of metropolises weighed heavy on poorer nations.

For Appadurai, however, a “cosmopolitanism from below” posed an alternative to globalisation, calling for a cosmopolitan anthropology that does not presuppose the West’s primacy. The world described is “postnational”, with communities deterritorialised in a world of global flows of information and electronic mediation. (Appadurai 1996) The views of Slobin and Appadurai shared with many others the idea of a breaking down of national boundaries as globalisation represented an outgrowth of the nation state, affecting notions of diaspora in an era of apparently unprecedented movement of people.⁴⁷ (Basch 1994; Soysal 1994; Hardt and Negri 2001) For these writers, cosmopolitanism is connected to such developments and is conceptualised as a recent phenomenon. Furthermore, concepts of deterritorialisation and the postnational appear inadequate in the context of an ongoing national liberation movement and, I argue, risk ignoring the ongoing relevance of struggles over geographical territory, particularly in Palestine.

Avoiding the “totalising character” of the term globalisation, the ethnomusicologist Turino uses cosmopolitanism more broadly to describe “translocal” cultural and political formations emerging in recent decades. (2000, 7) In post-independence Zimbabwe, he writes, the ruling government favoured a “modernist capitalist cosmopolitan” route, to more effectively compete on the economic level internationally; conceptualised as such, “cosmopolitans” are more likely to travel abroad or work for NGOs, hinting at the strategic choices encompassed in Turino’s concept. Zimbabwean musicianship operated within a framework where “local people deeply internalize foreign ideas and practices and make them their own”. (Turino 2000, 8) Missing in

⁴⁷ Vickers points out that the movement of people across borders remains heavily regulated, marked by class and nation, arguing that the privileges of jet-setting Western academics blind them to the fact that borders are less porous for the majority of the world’s people. (2010, 61)

my view is any substantive analysis of class, nor of the the unequal economic position oppressed or postcolonial nations occupy in relation to imperialism.

While descriptions of the appropriation of “global” cultural effects certainly have relevance to the stories I explore in the case studies, Turino’s broader definition of cosmopolitan sits uneasily with the position of Palestinians under occupation or in locations of exile where narratives of belonging to Palestine often predominate. Seeing nationalism as *emerging from* cosmopolitanism (2000, 13), Turino arguably sidesteps a more detailed discussion of the colonialism and imperialism that have fuelled anti-colonial movements, whether in Palestine or, indeed, Zimbabwe; in another work, Turino and Lea see Israel as Israel as “the most successful example” of “diasporic nationalism”, yet fail to ask who is served or betrayed by this “success”. (2004, 7)

The music making of oppressed and occupied groups is intricately connected to discussions on global power, to nationalism, diaspora and cosmopolitanism. Building on the debates above, Stokes points to a “profoundly asymmetrical North-South relationship” which shapes global cultural flows and with it the world music industry. (2004) Highlighting examples of the exploitation of artists in poorer countries by multinationals in Europe and North America, Stokes narrates a process whereby highly ideological, North-centric notions of authenticity and hybridity are entangled with “world music” business considerations of marketability. An important observation here is that the industry “equates the inauthentic with the nation-building project”, viewing hybrid, cross-cultural formations as authentic and therefore worthy of promotion. Anti-colonial nationalism sits outside of this business formula.

Visions of cosmopolitanism from below and globalisation from below have been combined in the views of some authors (Back 1995; Swedenburg 2001) but, I argue, can and should be separated. With Yaffe, I see globalisation as an ideological term, encompassing the frenetic and parasitic expansion of imperialist capital in search of new sources of profit, carrying with it many of the unstable and “globalising” features that characterised monopoly capitalism before the first world war. (Yaffe 1997, 2009; Bellamy Foster 2015) While we are presented with an accelerated spread of information and media in the digital age, earlier eras marked by formal empires and their collapse were marked in other ways by cosmopolitan or “hybrid” cultural formations. I share the view that musical processes carry differential meanings in the present context:

“Politically, one must distinguish between the hybridizing cosmopolitanism⁴⁸ (c.f. Turino 2000) of the relatively powerful from the relatively powerless... The cosmopolitanism of the rich must be clearly distinguished from the cosmopolitanism of the poor, even when the techniques and imaginaries of such cosmopolitanisms have common elements.” (Stokes 2004)

While operating on different terrain today to those described in pre-Mandate Jerusalem, Palestinian musicians continue to navigate a performance field defined by cross-fertilisation and take on a range of influences, whether or not they profess adherence to folkloric tradition. The three musicians in this thesis enter to varying degrees into the “global” relationships described. From their early years, their listening habits and social experiences carried many referents to sounds and phenomena usually not commonly associated with Palestine. Looked at with further historical perspective, the cosmopolitanism of Palestinians in Kuwait between 1967 and 1990, for example, was itself multifaceted and was, indeed, distinguished by that “of the rich” by its grass roots existence and anti-colonialist references. As in other locations of Palestinian displacement, “foreign ideas” were absorbed alongside a social commitment to preserve and transmit cultural representations of historic Palestine (see Chapter 3). Or, as Feld writes on Accra, cosmopolitanism enabled “diasporic intimacy of place” (2012, 219), a description shaped in connection to the Black Atlantic, but offering a reminder of the shared interests of exiled groups, and the social existence of music.

Like Turino, Appiah defines cosmopolitanism in terms of a broad category:

“as a global politics that, firstly, projects a sociality of common political engagement among all human beings across the globe, and, secondly, suggests that this sociality should be either ethically or organizationally privileged over other forms of sociality.” (Appiah)

⁴⁸ I see Ella Shohat's reflections as adding weight to this argument:

“Post-colonial theory's celebration of hybridity risks an anti-essentialist condescension toward those communities obliged by circumstances to assert, for their very survival, a lost and even irretrievable past.” (1992, 110)

Though I see the term as no less fraught, I focus on cosmopolitanism rather than hybridity, which I see as more embedded as a descriptor of “world music” by the industry itself. (Hutnyk 2000) My argument is not that national sounds are inherently complementary, but that, as Stokes suggests, the power relations, uses and objectives behind cosmopolitan musics cannot be easily subsumed. Furthermore, by rejecting a singular focus on hip-hop or another genre viewed as hybrid (Gilroy 1993, 107), and pointing to the continued relevance of nationalist or *turathi* performance of Palestinian narratives, I seek to emphasise the grassroots nature of Palestinian musicianship.

The view of cosmopolitanism I have in mind encompasses the points made by Stokes and recognises Appiah's definition but is wary of the "post-national" or nation state-transcendentalism mentioned above. While there has been an internationalism at the heart of the Palestinian national project, this has not, in fact, been privileged over the forms of sociality that have coalesced into channels of nationalist movement. In this "diasporic experience", music links homeland to "here-land" (Slobin 1994, 243) and, I add, carries the birthmarks of both. As argued by Singh (1999) and Tölölyan (2012), diasporas do not act as simple "weathervanes" to events back home, with "new winds" having potential origins in both.⁴⁹ This process has impacted Arab music more generally, with *avant-garde*⁵⁰ approaches proliferating in colonial and otherwise politicised contexts:

"The fertilization is never one-way. An Arab persistence splays open the multivalent, multidirectional, multisited, and multiply resourced makeup of the avant-garde, if not to liberate proliferating pathways to its freedoms, then surely to reveal its foundations in globalized accumulation and exploitation. The very existence of an Arab *avant-garde* helps defeat the well-worn imperialist tactic of falsely claiming cultures under occupation to be a tabula rasa, where nothing exists to challenge acquisitive ambitions." (Dickinson 2013, 6)

I add that the variety of locations, class experiences and historical moments through which Palestinians have lived in the post-*Nakba* period have produced multiple cosmopolitan conditions. I take Massad's definition on colonialism's repression and production of a range of cultural materials to mean that cosmopolitan socio-musical involvement is shaped by colonial conditions in and out of Palestine in different ways. The seemingly universal presence of Palestinian folklore⁵¹ hints at national preservation, but in the wider experiences of displacement and modernity⁵², Palestinian musicians take on and utilise sounds from elsewhere

⁴⁹ Leaders of the Palestinian national movement have operated from exile in Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Kuwait in various phases of the struggle. It is notable that many musicians have also built their performance practice from outside Palestine, including Kamilya Jubran, Issa Boulos, Simon Shaheen, George Totari and Rim Banna.

⁵⁰ A number of authors have used this French term to analyse a range of musical contributions by artists in the Arab world. (Burkhalter et al 2013) This is defined through an emphasis on "comprehensively hybrid and globally dialectic practices", undermining existing focus on regionally specific genres and notions of tradition. (Dickinson 2013, 1) Viewing influence as "polyvalent", ownership claims on "the avant-garde" as politically conservative, the authors recognise that the term is seen as "fraught, inauthentic, and tainted with imperialist agendas", yet implicitly open to challenge from grassroots actors.

⁵¹ While many young Palestinians admit to preferring Western music, almost all know *turathi* ("heritage") songs associated with weddings and other social events. The contributions to Suleiman show that successive generations of Palestinian exiles are brought up with traditional food, literature, dance and music. (2016)

⁵² In his work on Syrian musicians, Shannon depicts the complex interplay between preserving heritage and successfully engaging with European culture, with competing visions of modernity and authenticity. Modernity

in dynamic cosmopolitanisms from below. Palestinian music is therefore constitutive of many disparate elements from the homeland and in the place of exile,⁵³ the *ghorba*.

Sumud and resistance in music transmission

Into the context discussed so far comes the fact of transmission: here meaning the passing, conveyance or broadcasting of information or messages through music. The broad concept of transmission brings to mind, on the one hand, the handing down of stories, narratives or traditions by word of mouth or local practice, or elsewhere, the “official” or unofficial broadcasting of artforms, messages and views of the world. As Shelemay writes, the “transmission of tradition” is itself a tautology, with word origins meaning the same thing. (1996) In the Arab world, oral transmission has been notably embodied through Islam (Frishkopf 2009), in local language and poetry (Sirhan 2014), or in *qasida*⁵⁴ or other forms of epic storytelling attached to Arabic classical tradition. (Jayyusi 2005) I will briefly explore the use of transmission as an ethnomusicological category and outline my use of the term, before detailing the key questions addressed in this thesis.

Ethnomusicological discussions on the transmission of tradition have focused, in large part, on the way music is communicated temporally in a particular geographic area by native performers, with particular focus on interpersonal issues, technology and other modes of communication. For some, it was necessary to categorise the essentials of transmission into kinds of music culture, relating to oral, written and recorded forms (Sachs 1948), or as a paradigm between oral and literary transmission. (List 1979) The close relationship between

in Syria here conceived as emanating from the co-experiences of Arabs and Europeans since the 1798 invasions of Arab lands. A prominent view of Syrian intellectuals is concerned with composing an alternative modernity to one which accepts the “West is best” formulas of the mid-20th Century (2009, 77), instead focusing on preserving and appropriating “heritage”. (2009, 82) While Palestinians have no state to give impetus to such cultural policies, for the “official” Ramallah leadership of the PA, modernism has meant neoliberalism. (Baroud 2017; Karkabi 2013) Like the street movement of poor Palestinians, culture has been much more difficult to pin down and, despite selective Western funding, remains largely in non-elite hands.

⁵³ As general rule, I use the terms “exile” or “*ghorba*” rather than the contested label “diaspora”, opposed for its implied permanence or for its unhelpful equation with Jewish experience. (Soysal 1994; Kodmani-Darwish 1997) Other writers have preferred the Arabic terms *shatat* (dispersed existence) or *ghorba* (place of exile), or, for Said, “dispersed national community”. (1986) Gazan oud player Reem Anbar explains that she sees being away from Palestine as being in *ghorba*, a place away from home, while *shatat* implies being held captive - “like the prisoners... or like my mum's relationship with Haifa.” (2018 discussion with the author) *Ghorba* also has musical references, appearing in choruses of *Zareef el-Tool* and other folkloric song forms.

⁵⁴ The genesis of the *qasida* as a prized poetic form pre-dates Islam. Written in classical language, the form consists of up to 130 lines built around accepted metres and a singular rhyming structure. (Hourani 1991, 12)

oral traditions in folklore and anonymously composed folksong identified by Nettl (1983, 188) was based on research into a very small number of repertoires.⁵⁵ Nettl looks in large part to the informal teaching and learning of these repertoires and focuses on groups “that live entirely in oral tradition”. (1983, 189) His assertions that oral transmission is, a) “the norm... everywhere”, and, b) cannot be so easily classified as being dominated by one type, resound with the musical experiences of Reem, Saied and Raghda.

Much recent work on the subject has focused on transmission as a tool of “applied ethnomusicology” in the field of education, where ethnomusicology itself often becomes the object of critique (Shelemay 1996; Kruger 2009; Araujo and Silva 2009), while other approaches have looked to the role of technology in the transmission and preservation of music. (Taruskin 2005; Boorman 1999) If not positioned centrally in this thesis, both of these strands of inquiry have relevance to my study. With Arabic music, according to Racy, storytelling is not so easily separable from either the music itself or its pedagogy. (2000) Beginning the research for this thesis, it had been my intention to focus on the informal transmission of musical ideas through aural learning, particularly as so many of the Palestinian instrumentalists and singers I had encountered were either self-taught or had learned informally.⁵⁶ This idea remains part of my thinking, but I have focused to a larger extent on the material context of transmission rather than its pedagogy.

Discussing the predominance of cassette tapes in Gaza during the *Intifada*, I draw on Armbrust’s work on media in the Arab world, towards a historical approach that sees popular culture as part of a wider public sphere (2012, 48), in opposition to views that technological manipulation is implicitly bourgeois. (Taruskin 2005, 407) In the hands of a Palestinian girl living in a refugee camp, cassettes were both the repositories of Palestinian history and a route to involvement in the street movement (See Chapter 7). It was perhaps the sheer pervasiveness of “commitment”⁵⁷ and meaning ascribed to Palestine’s songs and music that led me to see

⁵⁵ These were “based mainly on knowledge of European and American folk music.” (Nettl 1983, 198)

⁵⁶ A Palestinian percussionist from Tarsheeha, near the border with Lebanon, reported that he was offered a place at Berklee music school in Boston, but rejected this route in favour of one-to-one oral learning stints with older teachers (informal discussion in Manchester, March 2019). Of the three musicians in the thesis, only Saied was trained in a formal music institution.

⁵⁷ As an important trend in Arab literature from the early 20th Century, “commitment” called for anti-imperialist or pan-Arabist art to confront the British occupation of Egypt and, later, to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people following the *Nakba*. (Stone 2008, 52; Wong 2009)

transmission as part of an approach to “cultural history” that asked *what* was being transmitted through the interplay of cosmopolitanism and tradition. (Stokes 2010, 20)

For Palestinians, the issue of transmission is intimately connected to divergent visions on the content and form of presentation, and, not least, to the very question of what constitutes “the Palestinian narrative”. (Said 1992; 1999) Indeed, the question of *what* is transmitted inexorably leads to the *Nakba*, centrally placed in conceptions of oral history and social memory (Chapter 2). For Reem Kelani, 1948 marks the “original sin” of Zionist colonisation, and a reference point for her own work. For Saied Silbak and Raghda, the *Nakba* furnishes familial histories, learned from a young age, on what was lost. The *Nakba* continues to take centre stage in Palestinian narratives and forms of mobilisation. (Baroud 2018; Massalha 2014; Aouragh 2012; Khalili 2007) Memories of 1967, the *Intifada* or of life in the *dakhil* draw on a repertory of Palestinian experience, frequently offering connecting lines between historical periods. The transmission or mediation of such memories becomes a social act and often carries critiques of present conditions, hinting at alternative visions for the future of Palestine.

Discussing the national identity expressed by refugees in her work on digital media, Aouragh argues that Palestinian existence continues to be “embedded in colonialism and anti-colonial struggle”, with the armed struggle providing a particular impulse for its evolution. (2012, 44) Building in Geary’s argument that memories are *for* something in a political sense, Feldman sees survivalist tactics in the “refrain of home” among refugees in Gaza, repeating stories on national history in order to prevent Israel’s complete destruction of community and political life. (2006) The Palestinian narratives discussed in this thesis encompass many strands of meaning, arising from particular and general circumstances of exile from Palestine. I see Aouragh and Feldman’s observations on the channelling of sorrow and loss into a battle to exist as relating to Khalili’s (2007) categorisation of modes of Palestinian commemoration into tragic, heroic and *sumud* narratives. In the musical transmission of Palestinian narratives, I have focused to a large extent on what I see as narratives of *sumud* and resistance.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ While I see tragic narratives as a motif in the stories of the musical contributors to the thesis, not least in moments of pessimism and expressions of hopelessness in the face of ongoing loss, I do not place such narratives firmly in the category expanded upon by Khalili. (2007, 103-110) The post-Oslo phenomena of NGOs and international bodies focusing on victimhood and suffering is a complex process and, if not unrelated to the themes I present, is arguably different to the way that musical memories are presented by Reem, Saied and Raghda. With Feldman, I see the tragic realities of Palestine being channelled into *sumud*, or into the survival of the nation (2006), and suggest that much in the narrative of the three musicians carries the refusal to be a victim. (See also Holmes and Taha 2018)

Narratives of *sumud* are interpreted, depicted or argued for in different ways, evoking an ongoing struggle for Palestinian survival and personified at various moments by mothers, *fellaheen* (peasants), camp dwellers, families and communities of refugees. As Khalili writes, *sumud* carries optimism, valorising the nation's endurance in dire circumstances. (2007, 101) Unlike heroic narratives, commemorations of this nature celebrate collective defence through holding communities together rather than daring militant acts. The separation is arguably never clear cut, however. With Umm Saad, the central character of Kanafani's novel of the same name, the memory and hope of return to Palestine is intertwined with encouraging the Palestinian revolution. (2000) Amidst the devastation of the Lebanese war, *sumud* was itself pursued in Gaza and the West Bank as a policy of resistance in the years 1982-93. (Schulz and Hammer 2003, 107)

Ethnomusicologist David McDonald views the *fallah al-sumud* (steadfast peasant) as the national construct of the early post-*Nakba* decades, being replaced in the 1960s *thawra* by the "uniformed freedom fighter" (2013, 80) in a "so-called return to authentic Palestine." (2013, 121) In his interpretation, the act of *sumud* had meant "waiting" for liberation and fell by the wayside as another constructed identity gained prominence in the nationalist movement. I argue that this is a simplification, as *sumud* continues to have relevance, whether in drawing real and idealised connections between people and land (Swedenburg 1995), a refusal to leave historic Palestine (Abu Lughod 2012), a stoic persistence to cope with abnormal living conditions (Allen 2008), or as a form of "cultural solidarity" in the case of Palestinian hip-hop. (Rooney 2013) The term's use in this thesis draws on these and Khalili's definitions, particularly towards the role of women and working class Palestinians in preserving wedding song and dance (Chapter 4), in depictions of rural Palestine (Chapters 4, 6 and 7) and in enduring Britain's immigration controls (Chapter 8).

No less debated, resistance narratives are often directly supportive of the liberation politics of armed struggle. Use of the term by has varied with the junctures of the Palestinian nationalist movement since the British mandate, with application beyond the guerrillas themselves. During the 1936-39 revolt, resistance came from the peasants and urban Palestinians faced with British and Zionist repression (Swedenburg 1995; Sayigh 2007), but also from the "resistance poetry" of Palestinian writers. (Farsoun 2004, 89) The latter is Kanafani's definition, taking on the appeals of the poets themselves, whom Kanafani positions centrally in both the pre-*Nakba* period and later as presenting "the endurance of the Palestinian masses" under Israeli

occupation. (1972) In the *Intifadas* of the 1980s and early 2000s the “resistance” referred to both stone the throwing *shabab* (youths) and to the militant wings of political factions engaged in armed struggle against the occupation. (Hroub 2006; Baroud 2006) Drawing on Said, Yacoubi views “repetition” and the inscription of Palestinian history as “indispensable for the very legitimacy of resistance and confirmation of Palestinian presence” (2005, 199) Like *sumud*, resistance narratives seek to paint a continuity between the past and present suffering, now portraying peasants, workers and refugees “as agents of revolutionary nationalist history.”⁵⁹ (Khalili 2007, 95)

With the emergence of a Palestinian brand of hip-hop music and graffiti, Salih and Richter-Devroe suggest “a radical shift in the relationship between culture and resistance in the Palestinian landscape.” (2014) The authors observe a movement away from the armed nationalist movement, echoing what they see as Stein and Swedenburg’s (2005) warning that “Marxist” analyses are unable to move away from the primacy of classes, states and nations.⁶⁰ With Tripp (2013), Salih and Richter-Devroe argue for a notion of “art resistance” separated from nationalism, with the propensity for “signalling presence”, “reclaiming public space” and challenging “hegemonic narratives” towards imaginaries of past, present and future. (2014) Similarly, McDonald rejects notions of resistance presented in the “cliché” tropes and “stock lexicon” of nationalist song, recognising instead a “perpetual drive to be” in the work of folk singers (2013, 23), and dismisses the Second *Intifada* as “terrorism.” He takes exception with Lila Abu-Lughod for not:

“problematizing the very idea of resistance as a useful category of analysis. She does not challenge the utility of the term “resistance” itself as a means to describe and understand the entire range of activity which might prove wholly indifferent and/or unresponsive to challenging hegemonic norms. For Abu-Lughod, resistance seems to be a relatively easy form of political activity to locate and identify.” (2013, 27)

⁵⁹ My description here is influenced by Khalili’s category of “heroic narratives”, celebrating the agency of ordinary refugees and demanding action for self-determination. Khalili adds that “heroic commemorations which valorize violent resistance across generations – even centuries – are quite costly.” (2007, 224)

⁶⁰ Stein and Swedenburg see a Gramscian, Birmingham School-inspired form of Marxism as a (positive) step away from seeing culture as having a “rigid class location, determining function, or political valence”. (2005, 7) The authors call for scholarship that “reinscribes Israel” within Middle East studies, rejecting “anti-normalisation discourse” or radical anti-Zionism. For further discussion on normalisation and its discontents, see Chapter 6.

In opposition to contributions dismissing nationalist resistance as a framework for seeing Palestinian performing arts, I adopt a Marxist definition in common with Kanafani's approach. While taking on board the points made by Abu-Lughod, against "romanticizing resistance" and instead seeing it as a "diagnostic of power" (1990), I see "heroic" or resistance-focused Palestinian narratives as directly related to the material relationships of power. This recognition is present in the work of Rosemary Sayigh, who, despite her repeated use of the term, does not define resistance definitively, using it as a descriptor for the "anti-imperialist, anti-colonial" character of the nationalist movement, carrying the tools to overcome intellectual as well as political dependence. (2007, xxvi) Neither has resistance has lost its effectiveness as a political term, whether by Palestinians in the *dakhil* carrying on daily life despite being designated as second class citizens⁶¹, or in protest movements against house demolitions (Masri 2015), or to describe the March of Return. (Chughtai 2018) While I do not directly categorise or ascribe a resistance narrative to the musical voices in this thesis, I argue that the content and themes of their work carry strong currents of partisan opposition, whether signified by glorifying *fida'yi* fighters (Chapter 7) or presenting their own music as acts of resistance (Chapter 6).

1.4 Chapter outline

The thesis is structured in a way that I hope will address the questions and themes that I have raised, building from the focal points encompassed in the thesis title and exploring the moments and locations of exile inhabited by three musicians. Seeing their oral histories as referential starting points and as primary materials for a wider enquiry, I explore forms of musical transmission in light of a range of influences, musical and socio-historical, which have shaped their approaches to, and concepts of, Palestinian musical performance. Setting their narratives within the themes encountered in this chapter and through the lens of ethnological debates in regards to collective memory and Palestinian nationalism, I see the case studies as a set of interwoven threads, around musical lives lived independently as component parts of a larger whole – or, to paraphrase Said, as dispersed voices from a national community.

⁶¹ As an Arab doctor in Galilee Hatim Kanaaneh admits a "meek and feeble form of resistance to the Zionist enterprise that seeks to obliterate our national identity". (2008, 180)

Reflecting the unique life stories and experiences encompassed in the case studies, the thesis is organised through a separate focus on each musician, comprising three “parts”, with each consisting of thematically-arranged chapters or sections. After this introductory section, Chapter 2 is dedicated to methodological process, introducing the musicians and my own route into the field, before expanding into three interlinked areas: a review of debates and discussions around oral history and memory, with a particular focus on Palestinian narratives; an explanation of what I see as the significance of the contributions of Reem, Saied and Raghda as oral historians; and an outline of my methodological plan, particularly towards fieldwork, interview techniques and positional issues.

The first case study, labelled Part I, is based on interview material with Reem Kelani and is divided into three main sections. Chapter 3 delves into the surroundings in her early years in Kuwait, setting a cosmopolitan musical environment within broader cultural and political events in a post-independence emirate; I focus on Fairuz, as the material of Reem’s first childhood performances; and on her mother’s singing in the home, reflecting on the casual transmission of Palestinian nationalist narratives; in concluding this chapter, I consider the extent to which the space offered to Palestinians by the Kuwaiti government was time-limited and politically conditional. Chapter 4 is the only portion of the thesis to focus significantly on the Palestinian wedding, presenting Reem’s recollections of two very different ceremonies, one in Kuwait, led by a westernised middle class, and a second, this time a “real Palestinian wedding”, in her maternal village of Nein. The latter experiences are discussed in light of a range of writings on *sumud* and gender in the Palestinian case. Chapter 5 looks at Reem’s band-leading career, seeing the anxieties of “world music” industry struggles as representing real barriers in British society, and examining the alternative spaces in which she finds an audience.

Part II comprises a case study on the youth and early career musical involvement of Saied Silbak. Built through a single chapter, I present Saied’s experiences non-chronologically, beginning with his description of a chastening formative encounter with an Israeli settlement music project, from which I move towards analysing a position of anti-normalisation in the context of the social movements of Palestinian youth in the *dakhil*. The themes encompassed by Saied’s account gravitate towards and harness a familial transmission of the *Nakba*, which arguably anchors his own narrative, drawing on a process by which he began to associate with other politicised musicians and read into literary histories of Palestine. Chapter 6 continues by examining Saied’s claim to present a “tougher” form of resistance through a dedication to

instrumentalism, linking other performers' channelling of historical memory into raising questions on alternative Palestinian futures.

In Part III, the focus of study is on the stories of Raghda's youth and adulthood in Gaza and Britain, with new insights into Palestinian social memory of both. Chapter 7 revolves around her participation in two particular childhood journeys: one, on a day trip to her father's pre-*Nakba* village, through which Raghda imagines a land markedly different to her home in Bureij camp; and secondly, through the years of the *Intifada*, described as a musical "bridge" to a street movement that enabled her to overcome obstacles to involvement. This process was mediated by the sounds of Palestinian and other Arab singers committed to regional solidarity, and their contributions came to be meaningful to Raghda in the uncertainty of the Oslo years. This music would also have continuing relevance to her life as a refugee in Britain, the subject of Chapter 8. In the sections that make up the rest of this case study, I draw on the experiences of other migrant groups and negotiate Raghda's varied messages on memory, emotion and music, and further reflect on the role played by music for a Palestinian in the *ghorba*.

Finally, in Chapter 9, I offer some concluding remarks on the project as a whole, drawing on the key arguments emerging from the case studies and reflecting on the questions and themes raised at the onset.

Chapter 2: Methodology

“We are more than someone’s object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us.” (Edward Said, *After the Last Sky*, 1986)

During a week of anti-capitalist protests and other events marking the European Social Forum in London in October 2004, I attended an event billed as a Palestinian vocal workshop,⁶² accompanied a comrade who had, like myself, been involved in pickets in solidarity with the Second *Intifada*. In an old church hall, we met Reem Kelani, frame drum in hand, enthusiastic to get started despite the small turnout (there were four of us in all). Reem struck me as a larger-than-life character, encouraging participation during the session. She reported that she had learned the “baker’s dozen” rhythm (see Chapter 5), which she taught us with sung counting, from refugee women rolling couscous in 13/4 time in their homes. In between discussions on life in the camps and *maqam* improvisation, Reem told us of her struggles to be heard in the context of a British “world music” industry frightened by the “P word” and unwilling to hand her a record deal. Despite over a decade of living and working in London, Reem still didn’t have an album out. As the hall filled for her evening gig of pre-*Nakba* songs, it was difficult to see why. Her band combined jazz and improvisation with Arabic folk and narrated a history of Palestinian dispossession that seem to have interest beyond the usual activist crowd. Reem would later produce two albums and an EP, all funded by her fan base, and had sporadic interest from the BBC and Womad. I continued to follow her work and look back on the workshop as the moment that sparked my interest in Palestinian music and musicians.

During Palestine solidarity mobilisations in Manchester in around 2012, I met Ahmed, a refugee who had grown up in Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza and had recently claimed asylum in Britain. He would attend demonstrations and we sometimes met up for tea or shisha. One night he introduced me to his friend Motaz, also from Gaza and who, once he knew I had a keen interest in Palestinian music, wanted me to meet his mother, Raghdha. With Motaz, she came to a screening of a documentary about Hugo Chavez’ Venezuelan revolution at Manchester Metropolitan University; we discussed socialism and Mahmoud Darwish. I

⁶² Reem Kelani vocal workshop and performance at St Michael’s church, Camden Town, 15 October 2004.

became friends with both Raghda and her son, being more or less equidistant in age to both, and was often invited round to their house, where Arabic food was combined with singing sessions of traditional songs and others by non-Palestinian artists like Marcel Khalife and Fairuz. Raghda had been through the mill of the British Home Office, including detainment at an immigration prison, and spoke fondly of the revolutionary *jabha*⁶³ politics of her family. Both Raghda and Motaz fancied themselves as singers but, for the most part, seemed to prefer singing at home with friends and family, rather than pursuing public performance.

In 2014, as I began to form ideas for research on Palestinian music, I decided to take up learning to play the *oud* more seriously (I'd owned a Turkish instrument since around 2005 but had done little with it). I asked friends and, after seeing a very polished performance by London-based Lebanese vocalist Christelle Madani, approached her for *oud* contacts. She put me in touch with Saied Silbak, who was at that time working on a music Masters' at Guildhall, and I immediately booked a lesson, which evolved into an interview. I visited Saied a few times during his period in London (he returned home after his studies) and we spent longer discussing his involvement in and philosophy on music than actually playing. Saied came from Shefa'amr, a small city in Galilee, and holds Israeli citizenship, but had made a decision to boycott Israeli universities. Despite performing mostly instrumental music, Saied was resolute that his compositions carried a powerful message of resistance and was keen to return to the audience in Palestine.

Meeting the three musicians was, to all intents and purposes, very informal and, aside from Saied, hadn't been motivated by a desire to carry out a serious study. Since a cursory undergraduate dissertation on Palestinian folk music in 2005, my interest had developed to that of an enthusiastic fan, an extracurricular music scholar and an activist with a desire to learn more about the history. I'd gathered CDs, articles and lists of performers in genres ranging from folklore to rap, compiling information on their whereabouts or dates of activity, and attended a couple of gigs by visiting folkloric troupes and by Reem Kelani. I began to learn Arabic in order to understand the lyrics – I had become a superfan. In summer 2013 I was invited to stay with the family of a Palestinian friend in Jerusalem and decided to arrange as many meetings as possible with fellow musicians, establishing some long-term contacts. My interest now seemed to be going somewhere.

⁶³ *Jabhat al-Sha'abiya*, the socialist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

With the June 2013 Arab Idol victory of Palestinian singer Mohammed Assaf fresh in the mind, this seemed like a good place to start with my exploratory interviews in the West Bank and Jerusalem. His story had captured the hearts of the nation, under occupation and internationally, and debates were taking place on what his success represented. Discussions with musicians on the ground suggested that not all agreed with the Arab Idol phenomenon⁶⁴ but, more broadly, pointed to the multiple directions that Palestinian musicianship had taken at a grassroots level. This included the Ramallah-based Nawa organisation's recreation of the lost works of early 20th Century Palestinian composer Rawhi al-Khammash in new concerts; the ongoing projects led by former Sabreen band members arguing for distinctive takes on tradition and cosmopolitanism⁶⁵; hip hop artists keen to build on the success of groups like DAM and MWR; and young musicians taking up *oud*, *qanoun*⁶⁶, or voice in a seeming renaissance of *tarab*.⁶⁷ Not all of the music was overtly "political" or clearly dedicated to the Palestinian struggle, but most musicians did explain their art in terms connected to nationalism or *sumud*, with many more describing themselves as part of a resistance. Others spoke of the need to continue singing music for the *watan* ("nation"), performing folk songs alongside new material written in poetry using local '*amiyya* ("dialect") forms of Arabic⁶⁸.

Musicians recommended other musicians and my list of contacts gathered during my trip to Palestine grew after I left. With the sheer breadth of musicality, there was much to ponder. I began to see that the multifaceted nature of Palestinian musicianship could itself become the focus of research. Moreover, the musicians I had met in Palestine left the strong impression that music was an arena where the power and contradictions of colonialism could be subject to fierce critique by those struggling to make a living out of music.⁶⁹ The task of transmitting such stories was fraught, shaped by conditions of outright disparity. While there were many possible

⁶⁴ Winning the contest meant that Assaf would be tied to the Saudi recording company MBC for 10 years and thus subject to its Arab pop themes. Following Arab Idol, the bulk of his concerts would be outside of the reach of most Palestinians, both geographically and financially. (Brehony 2018b)

⁶⁵ Interview with Said Murad, August 2013.

⁶⁶ A horizontally-played instrument, frequently with over 25 courses of strings.

⁶⁷ Pointing out use of the term in medieval Arabic writings and continued use today, Racy defines *tarab* as "a multifaceted domain within which the music and its ecstatic influence are conceptually and experientially inter-linked... A basic premise is that the emotive considerations, although by no means the sole motive for making music, have shaped the form and content of the indigenous music." (2003, 7)

⁶⁸ Interview with Reem Talhami, August 2013.

⁶⁹ A particular area of criticism was and remains the regime in the West Bank. Musician Basel Zayed was attacked by Palestinian Authority police at an open air concert in 2012 for his performance of the satirical song *Doleh* ("Statehood"). Massad has analysed the PA as representing a privileged comprador bourgeoisie (1997) and musicians may be seen as forming part of a growing trend of disaffection with Mahmoud Abbas' EU/US/Saudi-funded administration. (Baroud 2017)

routes for a focus and many musicians keen to narrate, I decided to begin from the *ghorba*, and build on my existing relationships to Palestinian musicianship in Britain.

In the sections that follow, I will outline my research process, discussing four main areas: the theoretical background to the approaches used, reviewing the relevant themes in ethnography and ethnomusicology with a particular focus on oral history; secondly, how the choice of the three musicians is related to the broader theoretical concerns of the thesis, what their lived experiences may teach us about their music, and what their individual stories enable; thirdly, how I arrived at the methods of my research, its questions and framework, including ethnography and analysis of historical discourse towards the material that emerged from my fieldwork. Finally, I return to questions on reflexivity and my own position as researcher.

2.1 Oral history, memory and narratives of Palestine

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, 1852)

Marx’s famous reflection on the 1851 French coup looked to a history of class struggle and political crisis to explain tumultuous contemporary events. Avoiding the traps of ascribing these developments to the work of “personal power” or arising from the “violent act of a single individual”, the past is interrogated as much as the present, transmitting a political culture that furnished the bourgeoisie with “battle slogans”, “costumes” and “borrowed language”. In discussing the musical worlds inhabited by three Palestinian musicians, and with them the narratives that they come to transmit, history weighs heavy. Seemingly presented at different points in the narration as personalised experiences, and at others asking to be heard as collective histories, the stories bound with musical memories communicate much more than the music – itself widely recognised as having the ability to carry meaning beyond itself. (Burkhalter et al 2013; Rice 2001)

As discussed in my review of cosmopolitanism and transmission, this thesis sets out to challenge existing concepts, looking critically at the circumstances in which Reem, Saied and Raghda have become musicians and seeking to understand their varied current approaches. Through addressing the particular conditions of colonialism, exile and displacement under which they grew up, this research investigates the spaces and platforms for transmission of Palestinian narratives. Coming from a musician-activist background, with prior knowledge and a level of familiarity with all of the three contributors, research methods had to be formulated that best serve the academic rigour and productiveness of my contribution. This raised many questions of how to approach the gathering and interrogation of information, stories and music. What themes in ethnography and ethnomusicology would form a relevant framework? How to apply methodological techniques of ethnography towards an understanding of Palestinian musicianship? And what could be learned from this field regarding the positionality of the researcher and subjects of study?

After offering some reflections on what I see as the compatibilities of ethnography and historical materialism, I will trace the theoretical problems influencing my approach to research. I will not offer a reduction of the published genealogies on the multitude of trends within ethnography (Larrañaga 2016) or ethnomusicology (Root 2012; Post 2018) but focus here on the important themes of oral history, memory and nostalgia.

Some ethnographies have drawn links with historical materialism, exploring the ways that forms of artistic expression respond to, or are produced by, the nuances of human existence under concrete historical conditions. Dickinson sees material conditions as “preponderant” in the performing lives of Arab *avant-garde* artists (see above), calling for “imaginatively proliferate feasible understandings” to analyse how musical aesthetics are tied to social formation. (2013, 24; 29) I see responding to this appeal as part of my work, viewing performance culture as springing from shared histories and particular lived, socioeconomic existences.⁷⁰ The noted Palestinian use of symbolism attached to the *fellah*, the land and to a rural heritage, responded to the material deprivation of resources by Zionist colonialism. (Swedenburg 1990, 20) Similarly, musical, cultural and social life are analysed in terms of the “materiality” of cities and locations of collective activity. (McGee 2011; Massalha 2014) While

⁷⁰ Economic precarity is cited as having particular bearing on politicisation and rebellion to commercialism. (Dickinson 2013, 26)

the approaches of the writers above are often subject to debate⁷¹, I see the materialist basis of such analyses as a useful starting point and an illustration of the flexibility and suitability of ethnology towards analysing the origins of musical ideas and broader narratives.

Palestine, music and oral history

Approaching Palestine music academically, oral history seemed an obvious route: I had read memoirs and ethnographies and, before approaching any institution or formulating an abstract, had already been involved in discourses around Palestinian music. Reflecting on informal interviews, discussions and advice taken from the musicians I had come to know, listening to their background stories and following up with searches into related histories was already part of my practice, if on the most cursory level. It also seemed clear that there were people (performers or otherwise) who wanted to speak.

Research based on life stories is often itself the subject of critique, whether aimed at the reliability of memory and societal manipulation of it, the speaker's social interest and need (Thompson 2000), or how far the recollections of an individual can be generalised to impart wider meaning. Such views are summed up by Hobsbawm, describing oral history consisting largely of personal memory as "a remarkably slippery medium for preserving facts." (Hobsbawm 1997, 206) In contrast, Tonkin sees the construction of oral history as "a profoundly social practice", as "representations of pastness", requiring testimony from skilled oral historians, whose authority is "tested" by academic historians. (1992, 12; 39) Pointing out that imperialism has operated without the literacy of its subjects, she points to the example of Jiao oral tellers in Liberia, structuring their narratives through partisan ordering and plotting to put forward moral and other arguments. In common with Kassem (2011), Sayigh (2007) and a range of writers on the Palestinian issue, Tonkin's gathering of oral histories is combined with research from written sources, prefixing her case study with information on the history, politics geography and social organisation of the country. (1992, 19) Such approaches challenge, therefore, the "artificial academic division of knowledge". (Gluck and Patai 1991, 3)

⁷¹ McDonald (2013) for example, sees a drawing on rural identities as divorced from the recent experiences of Palestinian Citizens of Israel; I return to these arguments in Chapter 6. The theme of rurality arises, to some extent, in all of the case studies and, while there are ideological or idealised notions attached to representations of Palestinian peasant culture, I agree with Swedenburg's sentiments on the material motivations for such developments. (1990)

Since the *Nakba*, oral history has been a central mode of recording and communicating Palestinian historical narratives. For some Palestinian writers, recording personal recollections was, in the post-*Nakba* period, one of the few means available to document a stolen and colonised history. (Turki 1972, 1988, 1994) Palestinians lacked “permission to narrate” (Said 1984), with the media and history books of Israel’s allies forming the dominant version of events.⁷² While not “oral” in the literal or ethnographical sense, such recollections were augmented by the works of other writers dedicated to placing the stories of refugees at the centre of written histories. While not, at this point, theorising their approaches, the 1970s work of Sayigh (1977; 2003) and Nazzari (1974) drew extensively on the testimonies of refugees in Lebanon, producing histories from voices unheard in mainstream accounts.

Oral history is positioned as an implicit challenge to Zionist historic narratives and methodology. Israeli historian Benny Morris explained his almost exclusive use of Israeli archival sources as necessary due to there being no Arab documentation available on 1948. (1994, 42; Massad 2006) Responding, Masalha writes that many Israeli archives are themselves subject to closure to historians and the public⁷³, producing an inherent bias towards Zionist narratives. Furthermore:

“Oral histories are not just about facts and evidence but also ways of exploring subtle narratives and voices of the people who are silenced in state papers and official documents. Indeed, oral histories revolutionized our “historical knowledge” methodologies by appreciating the “shadows” and by bringing to light hidden, suppressed or marginalized narratives. Oral histories have, in fact, brought together academics, historians, filmmakers, artists, archivists and librarians, novelists, indigenous activists, museum professionals and community-based arts practitioners.” (Abdo and Masalha 2018, 8)

Hobsbawm’s description seems to further break down in this context. During research in the Haifa region, Slymovics found that the history of Jewish settlement of Ein Hod, populated after the expulsion of the Arab population of Ein Houd, was told in Israeli-produced archives, exhibitions, newspapers and a variety of film media. Information on the nearby village of Ein Houd al-Jadidah, built by Palestinian refugees from the original village, could only be retrieved orally from its inhabitants. (1998, xvi) Details about the social life of pre-*Nakba* Jerusalem in

⁷² This process took place on a musical level too. Singers in Israel’s new music industry sang of the “empty markets” of Jerusalem and Jericho before the creation of the Zionist state. (Sand 2012, 92)

⁷³ It should also be mentioned that Palestinian literary and cultural material captured by Zionist forces in 1948 and after remains under restricted access by Israeli state archives. (Brunner 2012)

is extracted from the memoirs of contemporary Palestinian musicians. (Tamari 2013) The lost performance materials of composers is gathered from sources in Syria or orally from their students.⁷⁴ Personal accounts of collective experience remind and inform, setting a challenge to dominant colonialist narratives.

Questions arise, then: do oral histories work primarily to excavate or preserve? What are the theoretical implications of memory in the Palestinian case? To expand on a point made in a previous section on *sumud* narratives as a tactic of survival, Feldman observes that, “Displacement, like home, is a process marked by repetition. It accrues in memory, shaping people’s recollections of times before and of experiences since.” (2006) Are the childhood stories of Reem, Saied and Raghda therefore acts of crystallising in the memory the conditions of Palestinian pasts? Memories of *ayyam al-balad* (village days) and the *hijra* (exodus), Feldman continues, focused on the first generation displaced, not children or grandchildren, with attachments persisting “in the face of ongoing political defeat”. For Gazans, remembering carries the knowledge of decades of dispossession and occupation the more than 50 years of dispossession that have followed. “These intervening years, these perpetuating sorrows, surely shape these narratives.” (Feldman 2006)

Researching the Kafr Qasim massacre⁷⁵ and related strikes in the cities of historic Palestine, Robinson points out the impossibility of discovering whether the entire Palestinian community took part in mobilisations, as claimed in the *al-Ittihad* journal. Instead, she suggests, the reporting itself was “more important”, forming a historic moment in the Palestinian struggle, inscribing the massacre in collective memory. (2013, 169) Or, put differently, “The narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity.” (Connerton 1989, 20)

The narratives in this thesis do not remember massacres or a directly experienced *hijra* resulting from the *Nakba* or *Naksa* and, although trauma and loss are certainly present, I want to home in for a moment on nostalgia, voiced through the often “dream”-like, abundant qualities ascribed to historic Palestine by the three musicians. Describing the homeland as a “paradise” and idealising rural pasts is noted as a key theme in oral accounts. (Slymovics 1998,

⁷⁴ Interview with Nader Jalal, August 2013.

⁷⁵ On 29 October 1956, Israeli border guards slaughtered 49 Palestinian civilians, all residents of the central town of Kafr Qasim, as they returned from their work in the fields.

121; Sayigh 2007, 10) Return to the homeland is seen by many as the ultimate cure⁷⁶ to nostalgic longing (Boym 2001, 3) and plays a strong part in stories such as Reem's visit to a wedding in the village of Nein (Chapter 4) and Raghda's daytrip to her paternal village of al-Qubeiba (Chapter 6).

However, for Khalili, nationalist memories are "not unequivocally durable", pointing to the shifting mood of commemorative narratives, ruptures in custom and practice, suggesting "a far less stable notion of historical or national memory". (2007, 3) This is arguably reflected in the vulnerability of "environmental memory" (Slymovics 1998, 18) in the architecture symbolising Palestinian loss: Raghda left the cramped Boreij refugee camp for a day to visit al-Qubeiba, finding that a Jewish family had taken her grandparents' home after the family were evicted in 1948; her mother's village of Beit Tima had been reduced to rubble by Zionist paramilitaries, as had Saied's familial village of Damun⁷⁷; Reem grew up in a prefab bungalow built for British troops occupying Kuwait in an earlier period. We may also see non-durable qualities in the form of music transmission itself – for example, in the brutally vulnerable media of cassette tapes, bringing revolutionary anthems into the camps during the *Intifada* (Chapter 7). Or, as Bilal writes in the case of Armenian lullabies:

"[The songs] are also marginalized in the collective memory of Armenians living in Istanbul today, as in our technologized and modernized lives the singing of lullabies is gradually replaced by other practices." (Bilal 2006, 69)

Nationalist longings are, therefore, unstable in a certain literal sense, but, I argue, productive on a range of other levels. Analysing the work of several Turkish musicians, Stokes refuses to see nostalgia as "sanitizing the past", rather serving to "pose complex and lively questions about public life at a popular level." (2010, 3) As hinted at already, I see Palestinian musicians as serving up critiques of the status quo and staking claims that are beyond the scope of current leaders.⁷⁸ Related to this notion, efforts of Palestinians to tell their own stories also make claims to the power invested in having control over collective knowledge. (Davis 2010, 124) Nostalgia

⁷⁶ As Davis points out, nostalgia was seen as a soldiers' disease in 18th and 19th Century warfare. (2010, 242)

⁷⁷ I refer here primarily to the destruction of villages and creation of "facts on the ground" by the Zionist regime. This does not, however, imply a belief that exile is permanent. See Abu-Sitta for a detailed discussion on the practical and legal possibilities of the return of Palestinian refugees. (2010)

⁷⁸ See the use of *Mawtini* ("My homeland") by several musicians, including Reem Kelani and Rola Azar, as an alternative national anthem to *Fida'i* ("Warrior"), adopted by the PA in the post-Oslo agreement period.

is bound with material and ideological conditions and resources, and connected to the survivalist instincts associated with *sumud* narratives. (Feldman 2006)

As noted in my review of musical literature, Palestinian musicians often take on the roles of oral/aural historians themselves, carrying out fieldwork, collecting songs, lyrics and stories, as exemplified by folklore scholar Abdelatif al-Bargouthi, or by the Nawa organisation under Nader Jalal. Other projects include a vast archive of recorded musical material at the Popular Arts Centre in al-Bireh in the West Bank. They also include the three musicians in this thesis, who have, to varying ways and degrees, sought to expand their knowledge and repertoire of Palestinian musical heritage. Though having a strong connection to folklore/*turathi* music, these efforts appear unconnected to a singular genre. Other musicians have taken on certain musical referents to historic Palestine and used them in other ways. These may be said to include performers such as *buzuq* player Khalid Jubran or late vocalist Rim Banna, but the *turath* is also drawn on by rap artists⁷⁹, laying claim to the role of the *zajjal*, or troubadour (see Chapter 4). There are, therefore, musical references to folk history, even when the form of musicianship is highly cosmopolitan.

If oral history is characterised by some as being unstable or unreliable, what to make of the efficacy of music and song in the transmission of knowledge and meaning? In many cases, the musical researcher is positioned both the recipient and voice of transmission (Kelani 1999), with stories forming part of the performance. Saied recorded his grandfather's *Nakba* story and retold it during our interviews, and used phrases relating to displacement to title his compositions.⁸⁰ The musical examples are often themselves vessels of historic fact, such as the song-based *Intifada*-era learning of the names of activists killed under the British occupation.⁸¹ But many others are story-based and subjective. I see these musically brought representations of pastness as linking back to the broader issues in oral history and transmission, of which stories play a central role. (Sirhan 2014; Khalili 2007; Feld 2000)

Before discussing the role of the storytellers as “performers” to a certain audience, I will touch on the question of gender in transmission as an important theme in shaping memory in the

⁷⁹ Tamer Nafar used this term to suggest hip-hop artists continue the Palestinian tradition of oral narration and storytelling. (Interview with the author, November 2014)

⁸⁰ For example *Maqtooa 'a* (lit. “cut off”, or “piece”).

⁸¹ See “*Kano Thulath Rijal*” (“There were three men...”) or *Min Sijn 'Akka* (“From Acre Prison”), discussed in Chapter 7.

Palestinian case. In the “resilient resistance” embodied by *sumud* (Ryan 2015), women are often seen as central characters. (Naguib 2009; Kassem 2011) Facing marginalisation, maternity is nationalised and politicised reproduction are politicised as women are inscribed as leading the reproduction of the nation. (Kanaaneh 2002, 22) I link this analysis to to the guardianship of folklore and transmission of national narratives described by Bilal (2016) in regards to Armenian women. The prominence of female Palestinian vocalists in displays of *turath*, often combined with *tatreez* (embroidery) and *dabke* (dance) is noteworthy and revealing of the “home” truths that women lead in the informal learning of folk song and, to adapt Jenkins’ phrase on Kurds in Turkey (1996, 2), through a process of “becoming Palestinian”.⁸² I return to this theme in discussions on the Palestinian wedding (Chapter 4) and on young girls in the intifada (Chapter 7).

Performance and audience

Writing on the work of Lebanese musician Tarek Atoui during the Israeli invasion of 2006, Burkhalter describes the “strategic self-positioning” of musicians during times of war and resistance, and particularly their ability to negotiate “the local and Euro-American platforms”, offering different explanations at different moments. (2003, 100) Atoui is seen by Burkhalter as responding accordingly to his audience, to writers keen to emphasise his activism or, on the other hand, his cosmopolitan musicianship. The “audience” in Burkhalter’s account encompassed the public, media and academic, highlighting issues in the positionality of both interviewer and interviewee. As Tonkin argues, oral representations of pastness cannot be detached “from the relationship of teller and audience in which it was occasioned.” (1992, 2) Continuing the theme of oral storytelling in the Palestinian case, Khalili expands on this form of communication:

“We tell stories because it is through the structure of a story that we tame time, map space, and understand character and motive. What makes stories such powerful media of communication, explanation, and mobilization is their performative nature; story-tellers shape and perform their stories in response to a particular audience. In this performance, they take cues from their

⁸² Exiled in Lebanon, Fawaz Turki writes “I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child, I am one now.” (1973, 8)

audiences, respond to their reaction, implore them to engage with the substance of the performance and craft their stories in ongoing, iterative, and dialogic ways.” (2007, 226)

I understand this definition of storytelling as pointing to the motivations of the narrator and both their immediate and broader audiences. Stories told to myself by Reem, Saied and Raghda during focused discussions or interviews, for example, could be argued to take cues from my own standpoint and the wider readership accessing their contributions. Considering such concepts, the act of “performance” may be seen as “a genre of representation” and social change on multiple levels, constitutive of political standpoints and cultural ideologies. (Wong 2008, 78) Some contributions came, not from interviews, but informal chats, jams or music listening sessions. Sitting with Raghda as she searched online for music to listen to, for example, my presence may have made her think about what to play or “show”; although her son Motaz knew the repertoire of Palestinian rebel songs, her also danced to Western pop in Manchester nightclubs. Nationalist music and politics could be said, therefore, to have a certain time, place and audience for its expression, without impacting the sincerity and commitment held by narrators and musicians towards Palestinian liberation.

Cooley and Barz (2008) remind us that ethnomusicologists are themselves “social actors within the very cultural phenomena they study.” To Clifford, ethnographic truths are “inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete”, through which “expressive tropes, figures, and allegories” are unavoidable:

“Even the best ethnographic texts – serious, true fictions – are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control.” (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 7)

In this regard, I set my work in the context of the fundamental structural changes that Cooley and Barz (2008) identify in the field, away from an attraction to the “far away” and “exotic”, towards localised study that sees the potential negative impact on those studied by researchers, instead moving towards advocacy of the contributing individuals and communities. (Seeger 2008; Heller-Tinoco 2003) I will return to this theme in the context of a more detailed discussion of my choice of the three main contributors and of my research methods.

2.2 The three musicians as oral historians

In this section I will outline my research process, focusing on how the involvement of the three musicians is connected to the thematic and theoretical concerns of the thesis, discussing what can be learned about their music from their lived experiences. I will follow this with a reflection on my own positionality, with reference to relevant ethnographic and ethnomusicological material. Finally, I will set out the framework of research stages, methods and analysis through which the material in the thesis took shape.

Sayigh writes that during an oral history project with Palestinian women in the 1990s, she came “perilously close to ‘airport sociology’” – she had been asked to select speakers to appear at an event at Birzeit University but had to work quickly find them due to the time constraints of the trip. She felt limited by not knowing the position of the women in local communities and, in retrospect, felt that attempting to find voices to cover Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel/1948 Palestine had been over-ambitious. (2011) Before beginning my PhD research in September 2014, I had begun to take stock of the contact work I had done in the preceding period, discussing musicians and ideas for a focus with friends and potential supervisors. Failing to secure any university or arts council funding for a return to the West Bank or Gaza, I began to think more seriously about Palestinians musicians in Europe, so far absent from any academic texts, and bringing with them a range of experiences in Palestine, Europe and other locations of exile. This was, potentially, an opposite to the perils described by Sayigh – I had existing relationships with the musicians and felt that I knew their skills, approaches to Palestine and its music, and their positions in relation to “community”⁸³ and performance.

My Palestinian friends were mostly from the Occupied Territories and all had informal interests in music, but Raghda was especially dedicated, a singer and, arguably, a dedicated *sammi’a*.⁸⁴ Beginning to see Britain as one locus point for Palestine’s musical journeys, I immediately thought of its most active Palestinian musician, Reem Kelani, and particularly her knack for telling often detailed stories onstage. Meeting Saied Silbak added another take on music and another journey from Palestine. Sharing in a dedication to Palestinian music and in their

⁸³ I use this term loosely to describe the Palestinian and broader social circles in which the musicians functioned in Britain.

⁸⁴ Racy uses this term to describe the “cultivated listeners” dedicated to taking part in *tarab* performances, usually through listening, but also having knowledge of Arab musical forms and traditions. (2003)

personal drives to tell its story from their own perspectives, the three musicians stood out from my other contracts for three particular reasons: their contrasting approaches and uses for music; their distinct locations of upbringing; and their different journeys to Britain. I will briefly expand on these three points.

Firstly, the three nevertheless expressed very different relationships to musical performance as a professional, amateur or casual subject: Reem was an experienced and well-known vocal performer and broadcaster and, although not currently making a living entirely from music, led a band of professional musicians, mostly from the European jazz scene; Saied was, at the time, a postgraduate music student and early career *oud* player, performing occasionally in London with SOAS Middle East music ensemble or as a soloist; and Radgha was a former social worker who liked to sing at home with friends and family, but shared no personal ambitions to perform publicly.

Secondly, the three grew up in contrasting periods, locations and upbringings, and with them, different musical experiences. Though born in Manchester⁸⁵, Reem grew up in 1960s Kuwait in a middle class family in the Palestinian exile community. While her mother was illiterate and sang Palestinian folk songs in the kitchen, her father was a well-travelled doctor with eclectic tastes ranging from Egyptian high art to US stage music. As a vocalist, Reem is self-taught and had built up a repertoire early on through her exposure to Fairuz and Western pop. Saied also began with Fairuz as a child in the 1990s and learned *oud* at a small music conservatoire, Beit al-Musiqa, in his hometown of Shafa'amr; his family were internally displaced in 1948.⁸⁶ He describes politicisation as a teenager in connection to what he sees as an exploitative cross-community project at an Israeli settlement and has focused on composing instrumental pieces inspired by Simon Shaheen⁸⁷ and other influences. Raghda was born in Boureij refugee camp in southern Gaza in the late 1970s and experienced the songs of the *Intifada* in a leftist family. She took on the role of music therapist during her work with other divorced Gazan women in the early 1990s, performing a repertoire of Arab song.

⁸⁵ Reem's father had been studying medicine in Britain but she did not spend any of young life in the country.

⁸⁶ In all, up to 350,000 Palestinians were internal refugees after being forced from their homes *within* the borders of the Green Line marking the state of Israel after the 1948 *Nakba*. (Masalha 2005, 11)

⁸⁷ A prominent Palestinian *oud* player, also from Gaililee and now working in the US.

And thirdly, the *hijra* (“migration”) journeys of the three musicians to Britain happened for different reasons and in contrasting circumstances. Reem settled in London after her family were among those forced to leave Kuwait during the Gulf War of 1990. She has toured internationally and paid numerous visits to her familial land in Nazareth but cannot “return” permanently. Saied holds Israeli citizenship and came to London in 2013 for two years of study before returning to start a new band. At the time of writing, he is looking to return to Britain to pursue his performance projects, seeing the Israeli scene as overly restrictive. Raghda left Gaza as a refugee after the 2009 Israeli bombardment of the strip. Upon coming to Britain, she was held in Yarl’s Wood immigration removal centre before her appeals eventually resulted in winning leave to remain.

I see the professional approaches, contexts and migratory stories attached to the musicians as key to directly related to the broad concerns of this thesis. Music aside, the three exhibit, in their own rights, guardianship of collective memory, having lived through colonialism, displacement and marginalisation; all were “witnesses” to historical and musical circumstances relating to the Palestinian case. All had made their own efforts to document, learn or transmit: Reem in fieldwork, historical research and performance; Saied as an amateur collector of *nakba* memories and with a dedication to using epic fiction to inform his work; and Raghda in her process of casual storytelling, often with detailed descriptions of events around music. A further definition of the “skilled oral historian” described by Tonkin is that, the messages of oral testimony are “transmitted through artistic means” and “cannot be treated only as the repository of facts and errors of fact.” (1992, 12) That the stories of the three are bound with musical performance and discourse suggests that they all fit Tonkin’s category of skilled oral historian.

Following Sayigh’s argument that “protracted crisis and neglect of popular experience by the national leadership” have powered new recordings of popular memories (2014), it seemed clear that Reem, Saied and Raghda were well positioned to offer new perspectives on colonialist dispossession. The particular moments and experiences that their musical journeys had thrown up Kuwait, Shafa’amr and Gaza were, as yet, untold. Moreover, their musical routes indicated a possible extension of Massad’s definition on what is “produced” under colonial conditions. Concerned with both genre and the function of music carrying Palestinian narratives, I argue that the positions of the three towards music equip them to offer unique perspectives on these conditions. This became clearer during the research and interview process (see below) as the

particular class, gender and social statuses attached to the musicians' lives shaped their view of, and access to, their locations of upbringing.

Additionally, I see their exile in Britain, the land of Balfour and Sykes-Picot, as illustrative of three sub-themes relating to the transmission of Palestinian musical narratives under colonial conditions⁸⁸: being a central producer of a “world music” industry driven by profit and with particular views on the forms of music it promotes (Hodgson 2014; Stokes 2004); continuing British ruling class sponsorship of Zionism as allied to imperialists interests in the Middle East (Abrahams 1994; Petras 2012; Gulliver 2019); and with a “hostile environment” for migrants rooted in the economic and political continuation of the system itself. (Vickers 2012; Jameson 2015; Sivanandan 1991) While there were other musicians available for potential case studies, none of these had experienced the immigration system the way that Raghda had; few others had been so prolific musically and outspoken socially as had Reem; and none had expressed Saied's stated aim of escaping conditions of second class Israeli citizenship in order to pursue music.⁸⁹

2.3 The research project: questions, methods and positionality

Being a keen fan, a friend, or a supporter of “the cause” is, of course, different to being a PhD researcher, posing new challenges and raising new questions. How best to channel my own ethical values into the project in an academically rigorous way? Could anything be taken at face value? What to critique and what to leave out? Does ethnography encompass the merits and pitfalls of advocacy? Is it really possible or desirable to leave your “baggage” at the door? Where to start? In the section that follows, I will outline my process of research design, approach to interviews, related historical analysis and the positional challenges involved in the project.

Forming an understanding of the range of conditions, historical moments and musical environments through which Palestinians have lived, building knowledge of the ways

⁸⁸ Sivanandan argues that racism in Britain is “domestic neocolonialism” necessary for the endurance of capitalism. (1991)

⁸⁹ Although Saied was not “exiled” as such, his position as a temporary migrant was clearly bound up in political decisions not to “normalise” relations with Israeli academic institutions. In this sense, his stay in Britain may be seen as a self-imposed and temporary exile.

narratives are shaped and motivated, and assessing the ways that specific conditions shape music-making required thought and attention. Looking, in particular, at the contributions of other ethnographers and ethnomusicologists, I felt that the most successful works allowed interlocutors and oral historians to “speak”, containing a balance of ethnographic accounts and the information and political frameworks necessary to understand their historical context. Interested in political and social history, I saw the words of non-academic voices as bringing histories to life and offering social critique that often rejected respectable or accepted views.⁹⁰

My methodological framework built on the influences discussed in my review of ethnographic approaches, particularly towards oral history. I sought to understand the themes common in Palestinian accounts, the function of nostalgia, why and how stories are told, and how the relationship of interviewer and interviewee impacts transmission. I began from Abu Lughod’s “first principle of ethnography: listen and watch”, (2013, 8) finding myself influenced also by techniques of “deconstructing for constructing” (Massalha 2014, 64), investigating subjective accounts and experiences with reference to historical and structural forces, using an array of collected research to form a bigger picture. Focusing on the specific periods and locations in the lives of Reem, Saied and Raghda, I constructed a catalogue of background information and analyses, seeking broader literature on colonialism, cosmopolitanism and a range of related themes.

Structuring the fieldwork process

Forming the bulk of my fieldwork, the interview phase with Reem, Saied and Raghda was multi-layered, differentiated and formed through varying circumstances and relationships. I will expand on these points and differences after laying the general frame of reference for the process, which was conceived around several basic features in questioning, duration, language and recording technique. My questions for the first in the series of interviews with each musician were initially formulated according to a chronology of events, from early childhood to adult experiences. Using a semi-structured style and open-ended questions, I began by asking for: a description of home life and family background; experiences of a wider

⁹⁰ I am thinking, for example, of the razor-sharp critique of Arab and Israeli politicians by Palestinian refugee women in the work of Rosemary Sayigh. (2007, 147)

community; their first contact with music, songs or instruments; their lives in Britain and connections to Palestine. I will expand on this process in more detail below.

There were certain social constraints impacting where, how often and how the interviews would take place. These included the geographic issue of remaining in Manchester while Reem and Saied both lived in London; the professional, study or family commitments of the musicians or myself; and occasional limitations arising from the health of the interviewees. With these concerns in mind, infrequent but time-extensive meetings worked well for Reem, Saied and I; as Raghda lived in Manchester, interviews could be arranged at short notice. As listed at the end of this thesis, the interviews included: three with Reem Kelani between July 2016 and December 2017 totalling 16 hours; two with Saied Silbak between October 2015 and May 2016 at 9 hours; and five with Raghda, consisting of 18 hours between June 2014 and June 2016. All of these sessions were recorded as audio on either a mobile phone or other sound recording device and later typed. With Reem and Said, I followed up interview questioning with emails or phone contact for points of clarification and factual information.⁹¹ The interviews were conducted in English.⁹²

The locations chosen for the interviews hint at the manner of the working relationships built with the musicians in the period of preparation for the thesis and subsequently. With Reem, who I characterise as the more experienced and professionally-oriented of the three, discussions were semi-formal, fit around her performing and research commitments. Two of the interviews took place in the café of a theatre in West London, with which Reem seemed to have a communitarian bond, knowing the names of those running the café and their children and greeting them warmly. The fact that she stayed in the café alone after our meetings hinted at her regular attendance, using it as an office space to organise her work. Another interview took place in the back stage area of the Rich Mix performance space in Shoreditch.

I came to visit Saied at his shared accommodation in Brixton, where the interviews took place in his kitchen. The informal quality of our meetings was underlined by the presence of food; Saied cooked while talking and we took breaks from the recorded interview questions while

⁹¹ This sometime related to things that were misheard or unclear on the recorded interviews when I listened back, such as the name of a family member or song, but sometimes elicited further reflections.

⁹² This had not been a stipulation but continued what had been the accepted linguistic patterns of our interactions, probably because their English is much more fluent than my level of Arabic; the latter has improved greatly during the research process but I still communicate with the three in English, for the most part.

we ate, and then picked up where we left off. Sometimes his flatmates would come in and we paused the questioning while we chatted to them. There seemed to be a temporary, student-like nature to Saied's existence in London and the interviews happened at two different flats. Both were in the same area, however, and Saied seemed like he had become accustomed to living in Brixton, sometimes describing events he had attended or mentioning local nature.

Living in my own city, discussions with Raghda were more informally-organised and happened in a variety of locations around Manchester. These ranged from city centre cafes to two sets of accommodation, one provided by the Home Office in Longsight while she claimed asylum, the other a rented flat in Hulme. Although food, socialising and political activity have been regular features in our friendship, the interviews were slightly more formalised than our usual meetings; there was a sense that if we didn't set separate time aside, it might not happen in an organised or recorded way. Occasionally there would be others present, Raghda's sister Awatif, visiting for London, or Awatif's infant son Ibrahim, who often stays with Raghda and her son Motaz in Manchester.

While I did not follow a model of participant observation⁹³, music was embedded in my methodological process in various ways. When the interviews were based in their homes rather than in public places, the musicians felt able to perform access examples digitally. This was often spontaneous, as Saied played oud and searched online for music to listen to in the background or to show a song or piece of music referred to in his narration; he would also play recordings of pieces of music referred to in the text, some of which was not "ready" for public release. Similarly, Raghda played Palestinian and other Arab songs on her phone or laptop, some of which was revealing towards her responses to music (see Chapter 8). She also sings in the house, casually or for guests and, while this material was not recorded, forms part of the broader picture I established for the case study. In addition to these home-based practices, I further reflect on aspects of the live public performances I attended. During the course of my research, and in the period before, I attended several of Reem's concerts in London, Manchester and Liverpool and draw observations on musicianship, communication and context. I also attended two gigs featuring Saied's *oud* playing, both in London. Finally, the work of these

⁹³ Unlike Shay (1999) or McDonald (2013), I was not a direct "participant observer" in terms of musical or artistic performance. For various reasons, the opportunity did not arise to pursue vocal or instrumental training with the interviewees, although I have learned *oud* separately. Furthermore, as Clifford argues, traditional participant observation forms of ethnography can work in ways that leave little room for texts, giving priority to musicianship over other modes of research. (1987, 1)

two performing musicians is available in recorded format, including Reem's two album releases⁹⁴ and a range of online videos of both.

Following the initial approach to questioning referred to above, it was my intention that this would help to facilitate the flow of stories, anecdotes and personal histories that would begin to suggest answers to the concerns of my thesis. Taking a cue from Barz, who reflects that taking detailed field notes and reviewing these after the event would often enable the formulation of further questions (2008, 212), I used the aftermath of the initial line of open questioning to isolate potential themes in each of the case studies for more elaborate exploration. This meant delving deeper into both the teller's account and into its wider context. Each interview seemed to be the equivalent of being handed a list of essential texts by a PhD supervisor, with names of musicians, songs, particular concerts, village names, notable persons, poetry and so on, fuelling further research on the contexts and wider worlds inhabited or evoked by the musicians. Hours of conversations were therefore deconstructed so that I could reconstruct or interrogate the stories and information offered.

The contextual questions that needed to be explored related, amongst other things, to the historical, political, economic and social situations in the locations in which the oral narratives were based. Crudely speaking, this history included three main periods and localities: Kuwait from the 1960s to the Gulf War; Gaza from the 1970s, through the *Intifadas* and Oslo accords to the current era; and the post-1990s situation for Palestinians in the *dakhil*. More broadly, the scope of my research had to include developments in each location since, and in some cases before, the *Nakba*; some perspective was also needed on Britain. Additionally, I benefitted from having lines of communication with a wider cast of Palestinian musicians and activists. At certain points in the research process, I had informal conversations or drew on my interviews with this group in order to broaden my approach.⁹⁵ Examples included further insights into the Kuwaiti music scene (Chapter 3); linguistic discussions on Arabic colloquialism in song titles (Chapter 6); and on rural or village of origin connections felt in present day Gaza (Chapter 7).

⁹⁴ *Sprinting Gazelle* (2006) and *Live at the Tabernacle* (2016).

⁹⁵ Quotes from the three musicians and others are referenced in footnotes indicating when and where the interview or discussion took place. Quotes without footnotes follow the previous dates, with further reference to indicate a change of date.

Challenges of positionality and interpretation

To conclude this chapter, I will discuss the positional challenges presented by the research project, particularly as regards my relationships to Reem, Saied and Raghda, expanding briefly on my approach to critical discourse and what I see as the interaction of scholarly perspective and advocacy. Having known Reem, Saied and Raghda in different ways before beginning fieldwork with them, a sense of perspective was also needed on my position as “audience” for, and potential conveyer of, the narrative histories they offered. I see this as relating to both my critical questioning of their stories and to the way in which I constructed the writing forming the case studies. Several stories emerged from my first lines of open questioning and, though the musicians chose to tell them, the decision rested firmly with myself as regards what to select or omit, and what to question further.⁹⁶

As noted in my review of ethnomusicological and ethnographic material, although there are instabilities in nationalist notions of pastness, nostalgia expressed in visions of historic Palestine is bound with material experience and battles over collective survival. Recognising the dangers inherent in romanticising the musicians’ versions of Palestine or resistance, I take care to mediate rather than reproduce such perspectives. Examples include views of an Edenic rural past in historic Palestine, recalling unspoiled farmland, exquisite food or music associated with the *fellaheen*. Representations of this kind were voiced by all three musicians, remembering village weddings (Chapter 4), olive harvests (Chapter 6) and familial land (Chapter 7). My approach in the latter example was to draw connections between such visions of rural Palestine and the contemporary and historic experiences of dispossession, often marked by struggles over cultivation and resources. (Abu-Sitta 2016; Jad 1990) In this way, I see nostalgia as not necessarily a “cleansing” of the past, but rather a commentary on ongoing conditions. (Stokes 2010)

Similar to the moments of “refrain” described by Feldman towards ancestral villages, a valorisation of the Palestinian family is a common feature. To Reem, her mother’s nationalism was not politically-taught and, with the songs she sung in the home, was as natural as *za’atar*

⁹⁶ All of the musicians told of their experiences of different forms of Palestinian weddings, for example. With Reem, however, the fact of presenting two contrasting versions from the same vantage point seemed to fit well with the general picture assembling of her bigger story of Kuwait. Saied and Raghda presented other experiences that I found more enlightening of their circumstances in Shafa’amr and Gaza.

*w zeit*⁹⁷, a staple of Palestinian breakfast. Raghda speaks fondly of the moment her older brothers took to the streets in protest during the *Intifada*, their faces covered with the *kuffiyeh*⁹⁸ and only their eyes showing. Palestinian exile does not, however, mean an automatic affinity for the homeland. Edward Said wrote that his early memories of the country were “unremarkable”, “remote” and “a place I took for granted”. Said retrospectively saw his wealthy family of exiles as disinterested in Palestine and more “determined to make itself into a mock European group.” (2000, 75) I approached the case studies with this recognition of these differences and sought, through exploring the possibilities of multiple forms of cosmopolitan experience, to highlight the nuances of experience and commitment as expressed through music.

In the framework of methodology outlined so far, I have hinted at the differing relationships I developed with the three musicians during and in the period before study. As noted, the settings of meeting the interviewees, how the time was organised and geographic location all had a bearing on my interactions with them. Outside of the series of organised interviews explained above, contact has likewise been differentiated: I am on Reem’s mailing list, usually attend her concerts if I can get there, and sometimes exchange emails with her and her manager and husband Chris, on articles that may be of mutual interest, or for updates on Reem’s health. Although Saied has been back in Palestine since summer 2016, we have maintained semi-regular email contact, usually to talk about music, recordings, *ouds* or his plans to come back to Britain. I have continued to see Raghda regularly, sometimes at political events, but mostly at each other’s homes in Manchester, where we meet with other family members for food and socialising.

Bourdieu reveals some important issues in reflexivity when carrying out ethnographic fieldwork in situations of colonialism and war. Driven by “the need to feel useful” amidst overwhelming oppression, the author engages in interplay between their own dispositions and disciplinary hierarchies, aiming to “illumine the conversion of political impulses into scientific endeavours.” (Bourdieu 2004) I add that, in my case, the move towards the academic from the political was also, to some extent, a conversion of personal impulses – Raghda and I were close friends and I had been a fan of Reem and Saied’s work before getting to know them more. Yet

⁹⁷ Dried thyme and olive oil.

⁹⁸ The iconic scarf associated with Palestine is usually black and white, with a red and white version associated with the PFLP and other leftists.

the danger of turning away from one's political impulses is also, arguably, a persistent threat. Writing on the "moral crusade" of US liberals to liberate women in Afghanistan, Abu-Lughod points out that: "Instead of political and historical explanations, experts were being asked to give religious or cultural ones." (2013, 31) This cultural framing was, in fact, deeply political and embedded in the ideological machinery of the US during the "War on Terror".

The comments of Bourdieu and Abu-Lughod raise further questions on what the linked processes of interpretation and positioning entails. Does an interpretation of Palestinian stories as carrying political meaning represent another pitfall or essentialisation? Likewise, does the characterisation of sometimes everyday phenomena as resistance risk seeing *sumud* as a "natural" characteristic? Would such analyses amount to a reduction of diaspora experience to tropes or clichés? There may be no clear-cut answers to these questions, linked, as they are, to dynamic historical processes bound with the shaping of memory and identity in very concrete material circumstances, but I see self-reflection as an important step towards understanding how proximity is enacted, and how epistemological conclusions are made.

Following the words of Edward Said on his exile family, I find myself reflecting on the practices that have gone into this thesis, thinking in particular of the selectivity, choices, emphases and omissions that have necessarily been part of my research role.⁹⁹ Raghda's brother, for example, appears only as a protesting youth, wearing a *kuffiyeh* and throwing stones in confrontations with the occupation (Chapter 7). Why did I not ask her further about his current life in France? Saied offered the story of his grandfather's *Nakba* journey (Chapter 6), but I didn't ask him much about his parents who, by his inferences, seemed distant from Palestinian nationalism. Reem's life in Kuwait is narrated around music and weddings. Could I have probed more on a rather comfortable sounding school life? (Chapter 3). However, reflecting on each of these examples, I contemplate the extent to which the three musicians have "led" the discussion.

I have emphasised that the stories of all three musicians are "political" in various ways, both avoiding the "cultural" framing critiqued by Abu-Lughod, and seeing the self-determined stands taken by the musicians to speak analytically of their experiences. Although my initial

⁹⁹ According to historian E.H. Carr, facts are collected by the historian and laid out "like fish on the fish monger's slab", collected and cooked according to stylistic and ideological viewpoints. (1990, 4)

questions were decided in advance, even if they were open-ended, the narrative responses were shaped, for the most part, by the interviewee. However, as noted by Khalili (2007) and Tonkin (1992), storytelling takes cues from audiences in a dialogic process of responses in which relationships between teller and listener is influential. As discussed above, I do not see a contradiction between seemingly multiple roles in social or musical expressions of nationalism and see as genuine the commitments expressed towards the Palestinian cause. That said, I recognise myself as “audience” to the transmission of narratives in the interview process. Furthermore, while some ethnographers have seen it as possible or desirable to approach fieldwork as neutral observers¹⁰⁰, this was impossible in my case as the musicians knew of my leftist politics. This reality, and the fact that they knew my line of enquiry was music, undoubtedly influenced their responses. But, as I have suggested, so too did the knowledge that their words would be available publicly. Before submitting the thesis for examination, I presented the case studies to the three contributors in order to identify any factual errors or issues in reporting. While they all offered feedback, the only changes made to the text involved small errors with historical material, with the exception of a decision made by Saied not to name the musicians at the Israeli settlement project (Chapter 6).

Discussing his own role as musician as part of carrying out fieldwork, Titon sees beyond what he admits are the important tasks of transcription, analysis, interpretation and representation, towards “a reflexive opportunity and an ongoing dialogue with my friends which, among other things, continually reworks my ‘work’ as ‘our’ work.” (2008, 32) While nobly put, I approach such views cautiously. As in the interactions between musicians from imperialist nations and those from poorer countries in the context of “fusion” projects, such conversations “involve power relations that must always be carefully considered”. (Stokes 2014) I see these cautionary remarks as extending to ethnomusicological practice and, in particular, to the dangers of reproducing orientalist accounts or nuances.¹⁰¹

Following on from the observations above, and as a concluding point in this section, I see my role in the project as, crucially, distinguished from the threat of being a “mouthpiece” for the

¹⁰⁰ Massalha maintained this distance in her work in the Palestinian city of Umm al-Fahm, responding to questions from those she met in the field, that: “I’m afraid, as a researcher I should not and cannot tell you what my political identity is”. (2014, 95)

¹⁰¹ From the starting point of a “basic inequality” between the transatlantic world music business and indigenous musicians, Feld notes that “negative caricatures” are produced in musical and ethnomusicological production, adding that “discourses on world music are inseparable from discourses on indigeneity and domination.” (1996, 27)

views and narratives put forward by the musicians, and view my work in the context of recent contributions on advocacy in the ethnographic field. (Barz 2008; Hellier-Tinoco 2003) In the context of Palestine, this may mean:

“Finding ways to “indigenize” research and to feed results back into the community as tools for future struggle and self-determined development, would give oral history a role in de-colonization practice that would justify its claims to radicalism.” (Sayigh 2011)

Or, as Pappé writes, researchers should work for a narrative that “turns the Palestinian memory, oral history, and recollection into not just a register of atrocities but also tools of cultural resistance.” (2018) While I do not go as far as Sayigh suggests – in terms of facilitating Palestinians to choose the theme of oral research and direct its progression – I see her points as important in shaping the course of future work. In this thesis I have sought to balance my “advocacy” with interrogating the oral material presented by the musicians involved, maintaining a scholarly perspective and presenting a range of voices and opinions.¹⁰² Above all, I have approached this research with academic rigour and the utmost respect for the musicians involved, viewing their contributions as invaluable towards understanding Palestinian visions of the past, present and future.

¹⁰² Examples include looking into a broader range of historic material towards critical analysis of Reem’s expressed loyalty to Kuwait (Chapter 4); an exploration of the wider Palestinian music and political scene in the *dakhil*, of which Saied was not necessarily a part (Chapter 6); and a deepening of understanding Raghda’s memories of 1980s Gaza, with reference to literature on Armenian and Kurdish music transmission (Chapter 8).

Part I

A musical life in exile

The case of Reem Kelani

Chapter 3: Reem Kelani's childhood in Kuwait

This chapter uses analyses of material and oral history to describe the social life accessed by a young Palestinian exile in Kuwait in the period around 1967 and into the early seventies, when a large community of exiles took refuge in the emirate.¹⁰³ Three themes of focus here are the cosmopolitanism of a section of the educated class of Palestinians of which Reem's parents were a part; the position of Lebanese singer Fairuz in the transmission of a Palestinian narrative; and the narratives of *sumud* and resistance which shaped Reem's early involvement in music. These interrelated themes are deconstructed through an analysis of Palestinian nationalism and the specific forms through which it was expressed in the cultural lives of the exiles.

While Kuwait was a location for Palestinian displacement – ultimately proving tragically unstable with their mass expulsion following the outbreak of the Gulf War – it was nevertheless during the period of our discussion a place of certain cultural opportunity and openness for the refugees. Following on from the works of Massad and Chatterjee on colonial relations and nationalism, I put forward the argument that unique historic circumstances in Kuwait meant that a section of the refugees enjoyed a moment of space, relative freedom of movement and access to cosmopolitan cultural forms from the Arab metropolises, from the US and to some extent from the Soviet Union. I argue that this space meant that, whatever the deficiencies viewed by Reem towards a Westernised Palestinian wedding experience in Kuwait (the subject of our next chapter) the seeds of Reem's later interpretations of Palestinian musical heritage were sown in Kuwait.

The expression of Palestinian national sentiment was shaped by Kuwait's economic, political and cultural position, in a post-World War Two period when the Soviet Union sought to challenge US dominance in the Middle East. At the same time, the cosmopolitan experience

¹⁰³ Lesch reports that numbers of refugees in the aftermath of 1967 swelled the number of Palestinians in Kuwait to 148,000 in 1970, and 204,000 by 1975. In the immediate post-*nakba* period, hundreds of Palestinian professionals filled gaps in the fledgling state bureaucracy as many more from peasant backgrounds arrived via much more treacherous routes: "During the 1950s, thousands of young male peasants, many as young as fifteen, came to Iraq this way. Then from Basra, they literally walked across the desert to Kuwait. Hundreds of others came to Kuwait in boats used by smugglers in the Fao area (Iraq). On the way, many of those who crossed the desert died of exposure and many of those who used the sea routes drowned." (Lesch 1991)

offered to the Kelani family and those in the area of Sulaibikhat was, following the writing of al-Nakib, time limited, and ultimately subject to the whims of a dictatorship still firmly within the imperialist sphere of influence. I examine the narratives encompassed by Reem's early exposure to her mother's singing and to Fairuz, exploring the role played by cosmopolitanism in musical expressions of the Palestinian narrative. While the support of the Kuwaiti regime for the Palestinian national cause was qualified and temporary, the themes of this narrative – and Reem's stylised musical presentation – were pursued beyond this historic period and location.

3.1 Introduction: *Tom w Jerry*

“Palestinians, together with other laborers from Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, India, and Pakistan came to play a formative role in the development of Kuwait. That two thirds of all Palestinians had become refugees meant that this work force was particularly itinerant and economically dependent. Great opportunities existed for educated Palestinians to play key roles as engineers, doctors, teachers and civil servants in the state's fledgling bureaucracy after the state officially received independence from Great Britain in 1961.” (Haddad 2010)

The modern city-state of Kuwait was itself the product of colonial venture,¹⁰⁴ carved away from Iraq by British politicians in 1921-22 (Simons 2002), later placing the world's biggest oilfield within the borders of the new statelet. In the years that followed Britain attempted to gain concessions for drilling in the face of rising US competition and attempts by the Kuwaiti royals to maintain a larger degree of ownership; oil was nationalised in 1975. This drift away from British imperialism meant that local and international relations were by the 1960s in a state of flux. A now dominant section of the ruling class pushed for independence in the economic sphere, to break with, or at least diversify from US/UK dominance; during this period Kuwait moved towards being the only Gulf monarchy to develop something approaching neutral relations with the Soviet Union. (Kreutz 2007) While Kuwait remained within the US sphere of influence, the socialist bloc was also influential on a cultural level, while Cairo dominated the Arab airwaves and US pop augmented the grassroots musics of a transient workforce.

¹⁰⁴ Kuwait, and much of western Iraq, was earmarked for direct British rule during the wartime Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain, France and Tsarist Russia. (Fisk 2005)

Cultural production operated on a number of levels, state sponsored and informal. During Reem Kelani's childhood, prominent Kuwaiti music included the urban *sawt* genre,¹⁰⁵ Egyptian-influenced music and Lebanese-influenced pop. The magnetism of Cairo pulled strongly for Kuwaiti music industry, yet the attraction went both ways, with Abdul Halim Hafez and Umm Kulthum frequent visitors and the Egyptian composers Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and Riad Sunbati huge authorities.¹⁰⁶ Reem reports that she was exposed to much more:

“Kuwaiti music is incredible because its desert music, its Yemeni music in the south, its Swahili music, its African music... So when I sing a Swahili song, straight away I’m in Sulaibikhat in the swimming pool. When I’m listening to a Yemeni song I’m also there. This is just a musical fibre of Kuwaiti music and its influence. We would watch Iranian television, so I would hear these great Iranian singers. We used to get Iraqi television so we used to listen to Nader al-Ghazzali and the greats of Iraqi music. I mean, where do I stop?”¹⁰⁷

The multifaceted transmission of music to the Palestinian population during this period in Kuwait will be expanded upon throughout this chapter; in the next, I will examine the influence of US pop on the Palestinian weddings of the time versus the drive to maintain tradition. Reem's words on her father are illustrative of the cultural and economic process under way. Their family lived in Sulaibikhat, an area characterised architecturally by its colonial aftereffects as Palestinians populated the bungalows left by the British military in the years before. The exploitation of Palestinian labourers, along with Arab, Iranian and South Asian migrant workers would be the basis of the oil boom (Haddad 2010) but also required skilled technical professionals, though, for Reem, the “very basic” prefab housing had “nothing middle class about it.” This group plugged skills gaps in a Kuwaiti economy which had, by the end of the fifties, grown thirsty for additional workers.¹⁰⁸ (Lesch 1991)

¹⁰⁵ Sawt was itself influenced by a range of convergent musical forces ranging from Yemen, Persia and the wider Gulf to India and East Africa. (Alouzman 2009)

¹⁰⁶ Crucially, Egyptian radio station *Sawt al-Arab* added pan-Arab, nationalist and anti-colonial sentiment to Cairo’s established role as the centre of transmission in the Arab world. (Diong 2015) Egyptian composer Riyad Sunbati was only interviewed once on Egyptian TV and twice for state TV in Kuwait, in extensive broadcasts on his life work.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with in London, 1 July 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Ghabra notes that the implementation of a temporary status and strict regulations on visas was “not necessarily particular to Palestinians in Kuwait.” (1988)

Yusuf Kelani was a doctor and, like others in Sulaibikhat, came from an educated professional class which had for a period accessed a certain lifestyle which had exposed them to the souk of nouveau culture emanating from the Egyptian metropolis. (Danielson 1997; Landau 2011) This group of Palestinians were uniquely placed to access regional and international trends in music and performing arts:

“My father, of course, read medicine in Alexandria in the 40s... So he would sing all the Egyptian black and white films. Great works that were of the generation that came after Sayyid Darwish,¹⁰⁹ so Mohammad Abdel Wahab, Mohamed al-Qasabgi¹¹⁰ and he went gaga over Farid al-Atrash!¹¹¹ So my father would be singing all these songs. And at the same time, in Alexandria, in the 40s, when you would go to see a film – this is weird, because of all the British mandate and influence – you’d always have Tom and Jerry first. [In child’s voice:] ‘*Tom w Jerry, Tom w Jerry!*’ So every film you would go and see in Egypt, even if it was by Suad Husni¹¹²... they would always have a clip of Tom and Jerry, with amazing music, you know, all that jazzy stuff they played, so that affected his ears. And also they would play a lot of Fred Astaire films and my father would go and see them.”

Like other professionals exiled to Kuwait, Yusuf had the means to travel and the space to pursue a range of cultural tastes. The pull of Cairo meant that Reem knew the greats of Arabic music at a young age. Her father’s cosmopolitan tastes and particular interest in “jazz” styles proved highly significant to the Reem Kelani story. While the artists and soundtracks mentioned here could have perhaps laid only a tentative claim to the title “jazz”, the influence of the genre on the composers of the music was unmistakable. *Tom w Jerry* were not Diz and Bird but Scott Bradley’s zany scores took the energy of bebop and fused it with avant-classical sounds to animate characters that would become famous internationally. Likewise, Fred Astaire was by no means a jazz singer but his movies became a vehicle by which the big band “sound” was brought to a global market. Yusuf Kelani’s experience was by no means typical of the majority of Palestinians yet his brand of musical cosmopolitanism pointed to the mobility of a strata of the population. While Kuwait was “still an autocracy of sheikhs and emirates”, Reem

¹⁰⁹ Sayyid Darwish was a hugely influential Egyptian composer and musician known for his post WW1-era works and political theatre.

¹¹⁰ Mohamed al-Qasabgi was an Egyptian composer and *oud* player active from the 1920s-60s; a mainstay of Umm Kalthum’s ensemble until his death.

¹¹¹ Farid al-Atrash was a Syrian-born vocalist, musician and actor who made his name in Cairo, and was known as the “king of the *oud*.”

¹¹² The Cairo-born moviestar known as the Cinderella of Arab cinema. The “even” may refer to the adult content of the films, typically love stories.

says, Yusuf's doctoral career brought him to Alexandria, to Algeria – where Kuwait sent volunteers to help set up the health service in 1960 – and to Europe; Reem was born in Manchester as Yousef completed his Membership of the Royal College of Physicians.

“He knew a lot of the Irving Berlin and George Gershwin songs, so I’ve had him sing along to that on the record and sing Egyptian stuff. And on top of that, later on when I was in my teens and he came back to do his fellowship at the Royal College of Physicians in Glasgow, and he came back with records of Alfred Brendel¹¹³ and classical music, so he would play classical music, Egyptian songs, the American songbook, while my mother would sing Palestinian songs...”

Bilingual schooling for Reem and her three siblings at Dar al Hanan (in Arabic and English) extended to informal multilingual music schooling in the home. As Yusuf's transnational tastes shaped her experience of music, language certainly played a role - their father would sing Abdel Wahab or the Gershwin brothers for pleasure around the home and Reem's descriptions suggest that they were on equal footing. Reem would later defy the music industry critics who she suggested would reject the use of English language in her songs.¹¹⁴ But bilingualism was part of where she came from and Yousef's affinity for film was also surely a factor here. *Tom w Jerry* rarely spoke but the movie-connections of Arab musicians Abdel Wahab, Fairuz and al-Atrash saw their counterpart in Gershwin, Berlin, Astaire and many film or stage songs from the American Songbook. The home of her upbringing taught Reem a multilinguality of musical genre, through the traditional and high art song-languages of the Arab world and popular American art music. Reem's detailing of the seemingly incongruous co-existence of commercial stage jazz, European classicism, Arabic art music and Palestinian folk songs highlights a home situation in which all elements combined in an exile environment.

3.2 *Za'atar, zeit* and Fairuz

But did this broad palate of available musics mean that sections of the refugee population had let go of traditions in Palestinian song? Did Yusuf's urbane eclecticism – or the beaming in of Western pop – mean that national customs in music became less relevant? I will argue that

¹¹³ An Austrian classical pianist.

¹¹⁴ Concert at Matt and Phred's jazz club, Manchester, 15 October 2006.

Reem's experiences here may serve to enrich our understanding of cultural expression for those exiled from Palestine, and particularly in the period during and after 1967. Moreover, the informal mixed with the very formal as the casual performance of folkloric music in the home intertwined with Reem's early school performances as Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers embraced the national liberation struggle, raising questions on tradition and innovation, *sumud* and active resistance.

While Yusuf's record collection was atypical in terms of the Palestinian refugee experience outside of the professional class, for the Kelani children, the *aghani mama*, songs of their mother Yusra Zoabi, spoke directly to their heritage in Palestine. Casually performed in the home and typically in the kitchen, this repertoire contained songs whose exact historical origins, let alone authorship, were harder to discern.

“Closer to home, my mother would always sing traditional songs without telling us what they were. So she would be in the kitchen rolling vine leaves, you know I always tell this story, you must’ve read about it and have you ever had labaneh balls?¹¹⁵ She’d be rolling the labaneh ball like, “*Bil Hana Yam Il-Hana...*”,¹¹⁶ all that, you know. But she wouldn’t sit and say ‘this is our folklore!’, but just like my paternal grandmother she did it in terms of being in existence, which I think scares the Zionists more than anything else.”

“Of course I know all of them were wedding songs and harvest songs and... A lot of what I sing, you know, I learned from my mother without her saying ‘sing this song, it’s from this village.’ No, no, no. The way she did it is, you know, you’ve been to Palestinian homes and you see two bowls, one with *zeit* (olive oil), one with *za’atar* (dried thyme). That scares Israel, oh my god. Someone from Brooklyn - they don’t know! So the way they brought these songs was like, as natural and as organic and as threatening to Zionism and fascism and racism... *Za’atar w zeit*.”

In written word (not to mention in spoken or sung poetry), olives and thyme¹¹⁷ are often dramatised, romanticised and held up explicitly as national symbols of Palestinian belonging. (Jayyusi 2004; Parmenter 2004) Reem extends this corporeal metaphor to music to suggest that her *aghani mama* (mother's songs) existed in much the same way as food. In this narrative,

¹¹⁵ A dairy-based dish of Levantine countries, also known as *jubjub*.

¹¹⁶ A song taken up by Shafiq Kabha and others in the *dabke* tradition.

¹¹⁷ Traditional songs in the Il-Bustan collection also reference coffee (“*Ballah Tsubbu Hal-'Ahweh*”), milk (“*Til'at, Ya Mahla Nurha*”) and spring water (“*Marmar Zamani*”). (Golani, date unmarked)

songs were *za'atar w zeit* - they were intrinsic to the daily life of Palestinians. This comparison of music to food reveals Reem's belief in the ability of music to offer a recipe for survival. Faced with the colonisers' attempted erasure of Palestinian culture and its international supporters' refusal or inability to deal with the refugee crisis, the music-in-exile became the daily bread of their survival as a nation. Moreover, the songs, like *za'atar w zeit*, were a threat to the ability of the Zionists to claim anything resembling this kind of rootedness in the land. The function of these *aghani mama* in the home of a Palestinian family in Kuwait offer an eye into the role of *sumud* narratives in the everyday performance practice of the exiles. While Reem points to the ability of these examples of pre-*Nakba* rootedness to set a challenge to Zionist colonialism, did this casual maintenance of folklore constitute a form of resistance in and of itself? Should we take at face value Reem's claim that her mother's nationalism was not a conscious process? And can singing in the home be viewed as a form of commemoration?

Viewed historically, the *sumud* of the Palestinian *fellah* is seen as a model for maintaining a permanence of place in the face of land expropriations and population transfers. (Shehadeh 1982, 2008; Matar 2011) While Reem and her Sulaibikhat family unit were far removed from the land in more ways than one, her references to the symbolism inherent in *sumud* forms of commemoration are noteworthy. As Swedenburg writes:

“The olive trees that *fallahin* tend and the wild thyme (*za'tar*) village women gather have been elevated, through constant invocation in poetry and song, to almost sacred symbols of the relation of the people to the Palestinian soil.” (1995, 22)

For Khalili,

“Sumud narratives differ from tragic narratives in their inclusion of an explicit hopefulness. A narrative of sumud recognizes and valorizes the teller's (and by extension the nation's) agency, ability, and capacity in dire circumstances, but it differs from the heroic narrative in that it does not aspire to super-human audacity, and consciously values daily survival rather than glorious battles. The archetypal sumud narrative commemorates women's quiet work of holding the family together and providing sustenance and protection for the family (Peteet 1991: 153), or remembers the collective defence of the camp...” (2007, 101)

Viewed as a form of commemoration, *sumud* becomes both a casual and an active process. If

mothers preparing traditional food in the homes of Palestinian refugees in Kuwait did not require a planned process of national signification then neither, perhaps, did the singing of the wedding and harvest songs Reem learned in her mother's kitchen. That she chooses to tell these stories at all, and sees traditional practices as a threat to Zionism, echoes the process of valorisation referenced by the writers above. Politicised or not, her mother's role brought both survival and collective learning to the home in times when both sustenance and collective defence were historic necessities; they were also the years of the *thawra* (revolution), signified by initially Kuwait-based political activism of the emergent Palestinian leaders. In Reem's analysis the agency of the nation is evoked in its ability to sustain a musical and culinary connection to the land - and in the colonisers' inability to do so with any legitimacy. The music of *sumud* was therefore resistance to attempts to inscribe a permanency of exile for the Palestinians in Kuwait. Moreover, the narrator in this case was the Palestinian woman. While some have questioned the inscription of the officially stated role of women in PLO and other leadership discourse,¹¹⁸ it seems clear to assert that Yusra was the curator and performer of these historic musical texts. It is a role that Reem has taken on publicly, frequently referencing the “big mamas” as guardians Palestinian folk history and maintaining an artistic connection between the motherland and diaspora.¹¹⁹

Can Reem's assertion that this presentation of traditional song was as “natural and organic” as *za'atar w zeit* be taken at face value? And does this imply that Palestinian nationalism – or at least the concept of *sumud* itself – were also natural or essential phenomena? For these songs, of course, expressed associations with political and national life, even if they weren't expressly nationalistic. For a Palestinian to sing verses from the pre-*Nakba* heritage meant something beyond the song's original connotations when brought in a context where citizenship was unstable and the forced separation with Palestine was, for Yusra, a first generation experience. Reem reflects:

“When was it that the al-Aqsa mosque was attacked by a fundamentalist Christian?”¹²⁰ There's

¹¹⁸ Notably Massad (2003) and Darraj (2014). See Chapter 4 for the gender relations of Reem's Palestinian wedding narrative.

¹¹⁹ Her debut album *Sprinting Gazelle* was subtitled *Palestinian Songs from the Motherland and the Diaspora*. (2006)

¹²⁰ On 21 August 1969 extreme Zionist Dennis Michael Rohan carried out of an arson attack at the mosque in Jerusalem, destroying in the process a 900 year-old pulpit gifted by Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi. The blaze went on for hours as occupation forces reportedly prevented Palestinian fire trucks reaching the scene and sent parachutists and sub-machine gunners to quell demonstrations. (UN Security Council documents, 1969)

a classic scene on Youtube of people trying to put out the fire. I was asking mum, who was illiterate, what was going on. In a way that illiteracy helped me because her sense of belonging was organic, wasn't political but was 'this is mine by right and someone took it from me. This mosque is part of our identity' - she didn't bring religion into it at all. So I suppose with every diaspora Palestinian, not just myself, you build these events up and that's your identity."

Here, Reem builds on the sense of national identification she describes in her mother's connection to food and music through description of an instinctive, experiential politics that shaped Yusra's understanding of the world and, in turn, influenced her daughter. In the part of her life based in the home with her mother, Reem learned informally that she was Palestinian. Characteristically, there is a musical connection here – "this is mine by right" is a rough translation of the refrain "*ya halali, ya mali*" in Palestinian folklore (Chapter 4) and used by Reem among others.¹²¹ In this narrative, the form taken by *sumud* in the home of Reem Kelani's family in Kuwait was expressed through a musical politics of belonging to historic Palestine. We will see below in reference to Fairuz that this informal narrative of *sumud* existed alongside formal resistance narratives. Notably the cosmopolitan existences characterising much of the familial experience didn't mean that folkloric songs became less relevant or were forgotten in favour of a vision of modernisation or erasure in the face of Zionist ascendancy or Western cultural imperialism. The Palestinian songs instead took on a new life form in the Kuwaiti context, as a centralising theme in a patchwork of musical experiences. As Emery notes with the Kurds transplanted to Calais with the outbreak of war in Syria, music takes on "new meanings" when "so many people are uprooted." (2015)

It is worth reflecting on the form of transmission of the narrative *and* the music itself, with the implication that informal learning was key to the process of being Palestinian in exile. Reem sees music and politics, like *za'atar w zeit*, as having a casual existence in the home, connoting likewise their use as a means of survival; the relationship to outside events in Palestine engendered a political instinctiveness in her mother that related to her material experience of loss and sense of justice. Baily points to processes that demand that music act as a vehicle for identity:

"because of its special capacity to generate emotion... like language (and attributes of language

¹²¹ Reem's July 2014 performance at Rich Mix, East London, for example. See also the Mohammed Assaf song taking this chorus as its name. (2014)

such as accent and dialect), it is one of those aspects of culture that can, when the need to assert 'ethnic identity' arises, most readily serve[s] this purpose.” (2015, 199)

But it is the *casualty* of transmission that stands out in the case of Reem and her mother. In another context, Miller sees social encounters as more cohesive than “transmitted doctrinaire or rational deliberate processes” when pursued by supporters of “jihad”. (2015, 220) For Khalili, narration sees the “transmission of memories” as the core content of commemorative practices, arguing that a variety of forms, from ceremonies and visual representations to acts of naming, all carry a story. (2007, 6) The informal learning process of folk songs is, I argue, as commemorative of historic Palestine as any of these examples and is in fact deeply political. Reem reflects on her childhood following years of Palestinian activism and exile experiences which have undoubtedly shaped her reminiscences of life in her parental home. For the children of refugees in Kuwait, this casual transmission was crucial towards understanding who they were. Before arriving at a perspective of the space for expressions of Palestinian national consciousness in the wider arena in Kuwaiti society, it feels important to note that traditional music had continued in this casual way among families and kinship groups. I will look at an example of more formal transmission with the impact of the Fairuz/Rahbani songbook in the wake of 1967.

3.3 Fairuz, *Zahrat al-Mada'in* - Flower of the Cities

This section focuses on a contrasting example of musical and narrative transmission for the Palestinian refugees in Kuwait, as the music of Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers witnessed an explosion of popularity in the late 1960s. As a schoolgirl, Reem Kelani sang publicly for the first time, performing material specifically relating to Palestine. While Fairuz had performed in Kuwait before the *Naksa* of 1967, her music had renewed significance to the exiles in the immediate aftermath and years after. I argue that the meanings both explicit in the poetry and implicit through the traditionalised stylings of Rahbani performances became more directly connected to the Palestinian experience before and after 1967. I move on to discussing the relative formality of the performance of this music compared to the casual transmission of traditional music in the home, asking what was unique or special about the Kuwaiti context to provide the space for this form of musical expression.

“After a little while everybody was bursting into tears. So I stopped half way and started sobbing. ‘Mama, they don’t like my singing! They don’t like my voice!’ I didn’t realise at the time that they were all shedding tears over the war.”¹²²

At a 1967 Dar al-Hanan school concert at the age of four,¹²³ in front of a majority Palestinian audience, Reem sang *Zahrat al-Mada’in* (“Flower of the Cities”), a recently released Fairuz/Rahbani song dedicated to the liberation of Jerusalem. Attesting to the seriousness of the situation, it was a quick turnover - the Israeli conquest of Gaza and the West Bank had been concluded by June and Fairuz performed the song barely weeks later¹²⁴ at the Cedars Festival in the forests north of the Beqa’a Valley. Reem says she already knew she was “from Palestine” but was too young to fully comprehend the audience reaction to her singing: “everybody was sad and I didn’t understand.” But the concert would bring her more attention. While Kuwaiti TV was filled with images of Palestinian suffering, from that day onwards, Reem says, she was suddenly in front of the cameras herself, recognised as a gifted child and “being driven around from one show to another.”¹²⁵ The “holy book of Fairuz and Jerusalem” was Reem’s first repertoire.

The final stanza of *Zahrat al-Mada’in* concludes previously mournful lyrics on the fall of the city, its martyrs, refugees and children without homes, to paint the future in optimistic colours:

This is our home and Jerusalem belongs to us
And in our hands we will celebrate the splendour of Jerusalem
by our hands the peace will return to Jerusalem

البيت لنا القدس لنا
بأيدينا سنعيد بهاء القدس
بأيدينا للقدس سلام آتٍ

This optimism came immediately as the defeat was fresh in the minds of the Palestinians in Kuwait and the tremors of Israeli ascendancy would be felt for years to come.¹²⁶ Jerusalem was

¹²² Interview in London 9 December 2017.

¹²³ Reem frequently tells the story of her first performance, for example, her speech at the Wow Bradford conference on local activism and global solidarity, 5 November 2016.

¹²⁴ The following year Fairuz was awarded the key to the city by the Jerusalem Cultural Committee. (Cannon 2013, 111)

¹²⁵ BBC interview, 2004.

¹²⁶ 320,000 Palestinians fled or were exiled in 1967 but almost double this number, 655,000 left between 1967 and 1986. (Masalha 2003, 178)

symbolic of Palestinian dispossession and, for the Israelis, a prize to be exalted in Zionist mythology.¹²⁷ For the Rahbani brothers, this turn to a directly political theme marked something of a turning point, described as a more “realistic” narrative (Abu Murad 1990, 145), during a more intensely productive period characterised by “more overtly political” works centring on “popular resistance to a tyrannical occupier.” (Stone 2008, 95) If *Zahrat al-Mada'in* carried hope that the “splendour” of Jerusalem would be realised in the future, other songs around 1967 were more defiant. Choruses of “now, now and not tomorrow” (الآن الآن وليس غداً) signalled an impatience with *sumud* and demanded the right of return, promising to match fire with fire.¹²⁸ The turn to a more open narrative of resistance in the lyrics of the Rahbani brothers came as the Palestinian national movement reorganised and began to carrying out more daring acts of guerrilla warfare. At a time of historic defeat for the Arab nations in the wake of the catastrophic “setback” of 1967, the vision of Jerusalem as objective and goal was placed at the centre of this struggle. (Hirst 2003; Sayigh 2013) Heroic narratives often celebrated the agency of ordinary Palestinian refugees, setting a challenge to apathy or fatalism and demanding action for self-determination. (Khalili 2007, 224)

The attachment of Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers to the Palestinian cause was such that Reem says, “We used to think as kids that Fairuz was Palestinian.”¹²⁹ Gönenç Hongur summarises: “Her extensive repertoire comprises innumerable songs about romantic love, simple village life, patriotism, comedy, drama, philosophy, and contemporary politics many of which related to Palestinian nationalism.” (2016, 125) Yet this form of transmission was not the *za'atar w zeit* of traditional Palestinian songs in the home. Instead, Kuwaiti TV and radio broadcast Fairuz performances, including re-runs of her one concert in the country in 1966 at the Andalus Cinema Theatre (مسرح سينما الاندلس الكويت). Arguably even more significantly, Fairuz was adopted as a national icon by the Palestinian refugee community which staged the performance

¹²⁷ Shlomo Sand discusses the blatant colonialist lyrics of Naomi Shemer's *Jerusalem of Gold*, sung by IDF occupiers during the 1967 conquest, as “dangerous” and “even anti-Jewish”. The song scandalously claims of “empty” market places and unpopulated cities in Jerusalem and Jericho, echoing earlier Zionist claims of a land without people, ripe for settlement. Sand reflects that, “The transformation of Israel's conception of national space almost certainly played a meaningful role in the formation of the Israeli national culture after 1967, although it may not have been truly decisive.” (2012, 8) Kay and Abu Zahra see post-1967 Israeli domination of national space through restrictions on freedom of movement as having precedents in the British regime in India. (2012, 92)

¹²⁸ These lyrics were sung by Fairuz at the Damascus Festival gathering of Pan-Arab culture and politics in 1966 Arab. *Sayfon fal-Youshhar* (“A sword for life”) pledged solidarity with the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle: “We'll return the home to its owners and meet fire with fire” (ونعيد الى الدار الدار نمحو بالنار النار)

¹²⁹ In Chapter 7, Raghda suggests that she considers Fairuz, Marcel Khalife and Julia Boutros as honorary Palestinians.

at Reem's school - itself founded in 1965 by Salwa Abu Khadra, exiled from Jaffa and later a prominent figure in women's affairs in the West Bank. Dar al Hanan was a private school, attended mostly by the children of middle class Palestinians and Reem recalls that this and other similar events in 1967 were also fundraisers for organisations in Palestine. Transmission and presentation were therefore more organised and formal than the maintenance of folkloric singing in the home. The proto-institutions of the exiles were instrumental in bringing the Fairuz/Rahbani version of the Palestinian narrative to audiences searching for a commemorative, political and emotional outlets during the year of the *Naksa*. But if the Fairuz songbook was not traditional or "national" within the style or presentation of the wedding or harvest songs of Yusra Kelani's kitchen, then did it carry these characteristics in other ways? Did the lyrics alone reference Palestinian nationalism or was the music equally meaningful for the refugees living in Kuwait?

The Fairuz/Rahbani live production in Kuwait in 1966 was a rarity in more ways than one, as their performances in the Gulf were rare, and the Kuwaiti-Palestinian audience were witness to an elaborately staged spectacle with the Ambassador of the Stars¹³⁰ alongside the Lebanese state-sponsored Lebanese Popular Troupe (الفرقة الشعبية اللبنانية), complete with chorus, over 20 dancers and featuring fellow megastar singer Nasri Shamseddine.¹³¹ Interestingly in his work on Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers, Christopher Stone makes no reference to Kuwait, which is not included in list of countries in which the Rahbanis staged concerts (2008, 42) or in his chronology of music theatre productions. (2008, 179) The 70-minute performance was not, in fact, the presentation of an operatta or a formal musical play, but coincided with the 1966 release of the Fairuz album *Andalusiyat*, coincidentally referencing the name of the performance venue. Subtitled *The Rahbani Brothers present: Mouwashahat oua Kassayed*, the album sleeve notes credited the artists with the unique ability to "breathe new life into the traditional forms of Arabic music", namely the *muwashshah*¹³² and *qasida*¹³³. These were presented by a modern ensemble of strings, accordion, flutes, percussion and some brass. Both

¹³⁰ Fairuz was also nicknamed the Ambassador of the Arabs, the title of one of her later albums. (سفيرة العرب 1998)

¹³¹ Nasri Shamseddine was a Lebanese vocalist and actor. My description of Fairuz's 1966 performance in Kuwait is observed from Kuwaiti state TV recordings of the event captured in bootlegged online videos.

¹³² *Muwashshahat* (plural of *muwashshah*) are poems composed in classical Arabic and performed through group singing. Musically there are different schools of *muwashshah*, chiefly Aleppine and North African varieties, both laying claim to a history of poetic development in Muslim Spain.

¹³³ Although frequently improvised, the Rahbani brothers' adoption of the genre culminated with the composed stage production *Qasidat Hobb* ("Songs of love"), which premiered at the 1973 Baalbek Festival. (Stone 2008, 96)

the album and the Kuwait concert feature *Arja 'i ya Alf Leila* ("Return, oh thousand nights", a *muwashshah* with lyrics by Syrian-born poet Rafiq Khoury. This would be Fairuz' introduction to the local crowd and it seemed significant that the troupe brought a "distant" quality to the Gulf, evoking the sounds and sights of times past.¹³⁴ As if to highlight this connection, the dramatic stage presentation featured women wearing *fallahi* headscarves and holding water jugs as they sang along. Nasri Shamseddine wore the black and white *kuffieh* during a performance of a song musically referencing historic connections to Turkey ("No, no, the eyes of love are killing me" - لا لا له لا لا قتالة عيون الهوى قتاله¹³⁵) as men in traditional clothes danced virtuoso *dabke* during the instrumental sections.¹³⁶

Stone questions the legitimacy of "traditional" aspects of the Rahbani brothers' music, with Fairuz's son Ziad Rahbani himself voicing criticism and expanding on what Stone calls the parody/homage dilemma. (2008, 122) But for Asmar, the Rahbani Brothers' contribution was to a tradition that was also avant garde, founding a music style distinct from the Cairo scene's lengthy songs based on love, or Aleppo style of traditional *waslat* (song cycle; Asmar 2013, 149). While for Stone, the life of workless celebration at the heart of the villages of Rahbani stage productions is viewed with suspicion towards the construction of a mythical Lebanon that offered danger in a time of internal conflict, Asmar sees themes of wholesome village life and simplified struggle between good and evil as ultimately progressive:

"The family could have been influenced by savvy politicians into eulogizing the leaders or factional warlords of the civil war. However, their own political senses led them to celebrate the glory of the land instead." (2003, 149)

¹³⁴ Shannon draws on Svetlana Boym's concepts of restorative and reflexive varieties of nostalgia to discuss the place of Al-Andalus in music across the Arab world, as a mode for expressing visions of modernity and shared futures. (2015) While the *muwashshah* form is generally accepted to have origins in Andalucia, it has acquired a distinctly local style in Aleppo through a singing tradition formed over centuries. The *Rahbani Muwashshah* is arguably a distinctive variety of its own, based on short, stage production-friendly pieces and stylised contemporary poetry.

¹³⁵ A Syrian friend from Damascus and in her mid-20s commented that she only knew the Turkish version *Lele Canım* released in 1991 by İbrahim Tatlıses.

¹³⁶ Incidentally the word *reem* (gazelle) appears in the song, with references to rural life suggesting romantic attraction.

The rose gazelle throws a deep look;
And the night is bewitched by the darkness of her eyelids

ريم الورد ترمي القلب عيونه
وسحر الليل مكحل ريف جفونه

There appeared to be a sharp break in style between the traditionalised concert presentation of 1966 and the Fairuz/Rahbani songs Reem would learn in school a year (and a war) later. The introduction to *Zahrat al-Mada'in* is more liturgical than *mawwal*¹³⁷, with organ and trumpets and church-reverb, and at other points suggesting the influence of Soviet folk-symphonics¹³⁸; *Sayfon fal-Youshhar* (“A sword for life”) strongly implied military music; in *Sanarjiou Yowman* (“We will return”), the piano was centre-stage. If Ziad Rahbani was seen later as breaking with the traditions of his parents (Stone 2008; Asmar 2013), in 1967 they appeared to break with their own repertoire. Their avant garde reflected the musical connotations of the shift from *sumud* to the resistance heroics of the post-'67 Palestinian narrative. Yet just as the *fellah*, the steadfast peasant, would continue to be a part of the national landscape, the narratives presented by Fairuz and the Rahbanis - and adored by the Palestinians - existed simultaneously. The reruns of the 1966 concert and broadcasting of the rural idylls of their earlier work ran alongside songs from the albums *al-Quds fil-Bal* (“Jerusalem in My Heart”, 1967) and *Rajioun* (“We will return”, 1957). The *muwashshah* and the nationalist anthem would remain within the Rahbani soundworld.¹³⁹

Yet for all the stylistic difference and change of tone between 1966 and following the war, there were connotations in both presentations to suggest that the seemingly dualistic narrative carried strong meanings towards the Palestinian case, with many implicit and explicit references towards the Kuwait-based refugees. In the penultimate song of her concert, TV footage shows Fairuz smiling knowingly as the crowd reacts wildly when she sings the title, “take me and plant me in the land of Lebanon” (خدني ازرعني بأرض لبنان), forcing two repetitions.¹⁴⁰ For the refugees, the plea for return was obvious and stark. The final line of “Take me to the land” (خدني على الأرض) suggests themes to be picked up in later evocations of Jerusalem:

Open the doors, kiss the walls, kneel under the sky and pray

افتح الباب وبوس الحيطان وإركع تحت أطل سما وصلي

¹³⁷ Actually, the *mawwal* genre of improvised vocal introduction is absent from *Zahrat al-Mada'in*, composed in classical rather than colloquial Arabic. The Rahbani brothers were trained musically by Christian priests. (Stone 2008)

¹³⁸ I am thinking here of the efforts of Shostakovich, Khachaturian and other Soviet composers to include folk motifs in their symphonic work.

¹³⁹ The *Andalusiyat* album would go through at least eight presses by Lebanese, Egyptian, French and Greek record manufacturers, with the last of these on CD in 1997. (Artwork at discogs.org)

¹⁴⁰ This Kuwait performance may be the first recorded version of the song which is usually dated 1974 after the beginning of war in Lebanon.

If the musical performances of the Rahbani output turned towards towards urban realism and open solidarity with the Palestinians after 1967 (Stone 2013, 80), the singing of Fairuz before that point had perhaps been political on other levels. Reem says that early exposure to the Fairuz/Rahbani material - and audience reaction to it - gave Reem a growing awareness of the sensitivities attached to the subject material:

“Not just on Palestine but on singing, on performing. And that’s why I could never separate Palestine from performing, does that make sense? It might sound cliché but it really isn’t because it, basically, it was about standing on stage, working the audience... The other challenge that this repertoire taught me - since I was a kid and I didn’t realise it till I was older - is how to accommodate emotion and technique at the same time without letting one compromise the other... Cause everyone laughs about Fairuz, she stands still like a piece of stone, you know. And you’ve seen me live on stage! And not that I would compare myself with someone as great as she is. But I learned since I was a kid about this subject matter, it’s going to make people laugh and cry, so you’d better be in control as well.”¹⁴¹

Reem depicts growing recognition of her Palestinian roots alongside a developing relationship with music, which she came to see as inseparable from her homeland despite her separation from it. Her route into public singing was Fairuz, and in particular the repertoire that spoke of the Palestine left behind. The 1967 material carried optimism and urgency but, as Reem’s narrative of her first performance experience at Dar al-Hanan showed, the subject material also carried intense emotional references, dealing with grief, loss and celebration, brought to the fore in an intense period of Palestinian suffering. If the audience reaction to her singing was a socio-political learning curve on what Palestine meant to her parents’ generation, at the same time the affective qualities of performance were not lost on Reem. Her description of Fairuz’ “stone”-like stage persona indicates that a good deal of thought had gone into how the Lebanese icon channelled the song content.

While many more refugees would come to Kuwait as a direct result of Israeli actions in 1967, for Reem and many others of the first generation, the host environment facilitated performance and commemoration based on a Palestinian narrative, encapsulated in this moment by the singing of Fairuz. The emotional intensity of Reem's school performance of Rahbani numbers

¹⁴¹ Interview in London, 1 July 2016.

relates to a process by which Palestinian refugees commemorate atrocities in camps, funerals, performance events and on the streets (Khalili 2007; Masalha 2005), attesting to the power of music to convey national sentiment in extreme times. (Connerton 1989; Baily 2015) While music in the home could be compared to food in its casual transmission of national themes, the school commemoration was an organised expression of national solidarity. The Kuwaiti state had, in the first place, provided space for the Palestinian-run school to operate and, for a time after the concert, its media outlets would give Reem a platform to sing the Rahbani resistance anthems dedicated to the Palestinian nation. It was a relationship with understated significance, as Fairuz' own relationship to Kuwait was tied to the fate of the Palestinians. After her second concert in 1988, Fairuz, like Reem, would never return.

3.4 Bootleg Billboard, Bolshoi and Cairo theatre

So far in this chapter I have introduced the cosmopolitan music accessed by Yusuf Kelani and looked more closely at two strands of Reem's musical experience in Kuwait: on the one hand informally-learned Palestinian traditional song in the home, and on the other the more highly organised and state-sanctioned music of Fairuz as Reem began to sing. Both of these musical avenues were related to a re-emergent sense of national consciousness among the Palestinian refugees, as both folkloric material and Fairuz were utilised in a variety of ways by the movement for liberation. But at this historic moment, Kuwait was also the recipient and sponsor of cultural forms that were, on the surface, less conducive to these political tasks. Thanks to radio and Kuwait's newfound status as a nominally postcolonial and nonaligned country, children of Reem's generation could access US and British pop, alongside massive cultural projects that brought the stars of Soviet and Egyptian theatre to within touching distance. This section looks at a selection of Reem's experiences and discusses their "global" significance to the Palestinian youth.

Outside the home, the prefab bungalows of the Sulaibikhat district had been built along with a swimming pool for the enjoyment of the British occupiers which, in their absence, became a social space for the Palestinian children living in the area. For Reem, music stands out in her reminiscences of times hanging out by the poolside radio, drinking cola and meeting her schoolmates at the swimming club. This is where Anglo-American commercial pop music came in:

“...thanks to globalisation, and even then it was happening, pop music was big in Kuwait. So Don Maclean, god forbid, Donnie Osmond and David Cassidy and the Beatles, everybody played their stuff, you know, bootleg stuff... I remember everyone loved that one [sings] Nights in Black Satin... Everybody used to sing it in this Sulaibikhat swimming club... They would play everything, we’d be singing and they’d play: [sings] ‘Bye bye Miss American pie...’ You know, we had all of that, we had... god forbid, god forbid, god forbid, Cliff Richard... We grew up listening to all of that stuff, the Animals, Cat Stevens and: [sings] ‘In the summertime...’, you know, Mungo Jerry. We’d walk with our ghetto blasters into this Sulaibikhat swimming pool and sing all this stuff so... And we didn’t see any contrast.”

Reem recollects these hits sardonically, cringing at the mere mention of Cliff and Donnie, all squeaky clean, starched shirts and super white teeth. While she shudders to remember this cheesy repertoire in 60s-70s era pop, the overall impression is that, for the Palestinian kids, times at the Sulaibikhat swimming pool were joyous occasions. Reem can’t contain her laughter as she remembers a few lyrics, suggesting that the swimming club music was its main attraction; at no point does Reem mention swimming.

If Kuwaiti music, Palestinian folk and the Cairo-Beirut axis of Arabic music offered regionally-distinct sounds, chiming with Palestinian nationalism, pan-Arabism or banal enjoyment, then what did Western pop represent? References to “globalisation” are interesting in this context. Then and now the cultural aspects of a “globalised” system are inextricable from questions of economic and political power. (Yaffe 1996; Stokes 2012; Varriale 2016) Before independence, European culture had been pervasive to the extent that Arab nationalists had incorporated its influence, sometimes within structures of Arab tradition.¹⁴² British and North American sounds were therefore not hegemonic in the sense of an irresistible and all-dominating cultural imperialism. While the modern phenomenon of globalisation is the object of resistance for many musicians its cultural effects are often appropriated by oppressed groups. (Rooney 2013; Gilroy 2010) It seems noteworthy in the case of the Kuwait-based Palestinians that the music was broadcast informally rather than beamed in by colonialist record stations. The bootlegging of US pop in 1960s Sulaibikhat – arguably a sideshow to the music promoted more officially by the Palestinian community – was the latest act in a wave of cultural expropriations.

¹⁴² Sayyid Darwish was one of a number of radical musicians drawn to the British cultural exports gaining influence among urban elites in Cairo in the first decades of the 20th Century. “While the ruling class’s affinity for European culture was only natural because they were tied to Europeans in business, and therefore social relations, even Egyptian nationalist scholars and artists were drawn to it.” (Muhssin 2013, 129)

Reem connects the “swimming club” activities to a broader picture involving Kuwaiti state patronage of visiting theatre, music and dance troupes. But while Cliff Richard and Mungo Jerry were present only in vinyl, the Soviet Union took the unusual step (in the Gulf context at least) of sending high-profile state ensembles as cultural ambassadors for improved relations with between Kuwait and the socialist bloc. For Reem and the other children this meant free performances of Bolshoi Theatre and East European folk ensembles. “Dance was used as a weapon”, she says, while adding that she was influenced by “the idea that folk music is not just something to sing in the field... it's something you can perform and share with others.” The Soviet socialist project left its cultural imprint on Lebanon and the Rahbanis (Stone 2008), Syria (Silverstein 2013), Palestine¹⁴³ and indeed the wider Arab world.¹⁴⁴ Its brief push for influence in Kuwait came at a time when US dominance was not quite so certain as in the years of the counterrevolution and Gulf War.

But if the highly trained performers representing the socialist bloc and the trashy pop of US vinyl were the shocktroops of the cultural Cold War, the post-colonial metropolis of Nasser's Egypt meant that Cairo continued to act as a centrally influential hub of Arab performance. While this meant that many composers in Kuwait based their works on the Egyptian moulds, Reem also draws our attention to theatre. Firstly, she says, the refugees were able to get a glimpse of the burgeoning scene in 20th Century Arabic stagecraft, a privilege arising from Kuwait's unique standing in the region at the time as a protagonist for culture:

“These guys started the theatre movement before anyone else in the Arab world, *al-harakat al-masrahiyya* (“the theatre movement”), and they brought one of Sayyid Darwish's contemporaries Zaky Tulaymat, a legend Egyptian of Lebanese origin, to come and train young men and women in Kuwait into becoming actors and actresses. You see how progressive that is? I mean, yes there's no kissing scenes, no touching... but still! So I had that in front of me.”

Reem would develop a lifelong passion for the work of Sayyid Darwish and she here references the continuing influence of Egyptian theatre; that a representative of the *haraka* was brought as a teacher to Kuwait's own daughters and sons in the field of acting was huge in her eyes.

¹⁴³ Many Palestinian citizens of Israel, for example, received Soviet university scholarships. (Arar 2016)

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Massad's references to Soviet influence on the music of Mohammad Abdel-Wahab, Abdel Halim Hafez and others singing for Palestine in the post-1948 era. (2005, 179)

Reem emphasises the mixed heritage of Zaky Tulaymat, himself the vehicle of technical expertise facilitating the uplifting of the Kuwaiti *harakat al-masrahiyya* to new levels. (Frishkopf 2009) Tulaymat was, like her, a product of more than one environment – his father had emigrated from Syria to Egypt and married an Egyptian woman. He made his name in this semi-adoptive environment and became a huge star, making it all the more significant that he saw something worth pursuing in a new adoptive environment in Kuwait – and Tulaymat was in his seventies at least by this point.

The presence of such a highly skilled professional as Tulaymat was a signifier of Egypt's wider aims at being a leading nation in the development of the arts, spurred on by the commercial and artistic successes of Cairo and Alexandria. Reem sees this move as highlighting the “progressive” policy of the Kuwaiti government towards culture in general, a theme she would develop through our discussion – already in these initial statements she expresses a sense of pride in having lived in Kuwait; the onstage intimacy she describes could be compared with the rising right wing conservatism of Saudi Arabia, which would come to ban and suppress cinema and theatre.¹⁴⁵ The uniqueness of access for Palestinian refugee youth, including Egyptian theatre and the Soviet Bolshoi was a result, Reem says, of a Kuwaiti-sponsored project, *al-Tarweeha al-Siyahi*, “touristic entertainment” for those Palestinians, like her own family, who weren't well off enough to visit Palestine every summer.

3.5 Conclusions: Colonial effects and a cosmopolitanism betrayed

The symbolism of Reem's personal attachment to Kuwait can't be overstated. Her parents died inside when they left, she says. It was “the next best thing to being in Palestine... Kuwait gave us Palestine”, allowing the exiles to “have our own mini-culture” and offering the children the kind of provision discussed so far in this chapter. While she says she knows Kuwait was an autocratic regime, she views the Palestinian leadership decision to support Saddam Hussein “instead of the country that hosted them” as a betrayal, triggering the mass exodus of 1990-91. I return in this concluding section to what was ultimately a temporary status afforded to the

¹⁴⁵ In December 2017, the Saudi cultural ministry announced that movie theatres would be allowed after a more than 35-year ban. Al-Garni suggests that, while ultra-conservatives deemed that a ban was necessary to curb outside “invasions” into Arab and Muslim culture, cultural censorship has led to an underdevelopment and a dependence on the use of imported Western cultural products. (2000)

Palestinians in Kuwait.¹⁴⁶ As non-citizens, elite tolerance for their presence would be buried in the sand. I argue that the social openness experienced by the Palestinians in the decades before was the result of unique historic circumstances which can broaden our concept of space, transmission and cosmopolitanism.

Reem alludes to the space offered by the Kuwaiti government to the Palestinians in the post-*Nakba* and post-*Naksa* years. Unlike Jordan and Lebanon, there were during this period no waves of mass repression¹⁴⁷ by state forces or Israeli interventionism in Kuwait. (Hirst 2011; Khalili 2007; Sayigh 2007) While there was geographic distance from the front line, those Kuwait-based Palestinians with the financial means to do so travelled freely. From oil boom and nationalisation to its vacillating position in the Cold War, a nominally independent Kuwait was at this point still able to provide the families of educated refugee workers with a decent standard of living. In return for the specialist skills they provided to the economy, Palestinians were allowed to organise themselves politically and culturally. Yasser Arafat's Fatah party was able to flourish and assume leadership of the national movement in exile. Other significant figures in the Palestinian cause lived for periods in exile in Kuwait, including Ghassan Kanafani, Naji al-Ali¹⁴⁸ and Mahmoud Abbas.

During a "postcolonial" moment in Kuwaiti history, the expression of Palestinian nationalist ideas continued towards the 1990s; during the *Intifada*, Reem reports, there were "fundraisers left right and centre". National sentiment was raised in weddings, performances, rallies and all manner of forms carrying narratives of *sumud* and resistance. These events necessarily related to the situation on the ground in Palestine and the struggle in the wider region. Reem discusses Fairuz in tandem with the events of 1967 and places her own performance of *Zahrat al-Mada'in* in a definite historical context. For the grown-ups, connected to these cultural presentations were the material tasks of Palestinian liberation. Turino suggests that these processes are inseparable:

¹⁴⁶ A key point to keep in mind throughout this discussion. Palestinians resident in Kuwait were denied permanent residency status and were registered officially as guest workers; their Kuwaiti-born children were likewise denied citizenship. (Lesch 1991)

¹⁴⁷ This did not mean, however, that the Kuwaiti state police acted impartially. Reem reports that pro-Palestinian demonstrations in the 1980s were physically attacked.

¹⁴⁸ A leftist Palestinian cartoonist best known for his child character Handala.

“Creating or maintaining national sentiment is a necessary goal of nationalist movements, but it is only one of two fundamental goals, the other being the military or political maneuvering to secure and maintain control of a coterminous state.” (Turino 2000, 14)

That the goals of Palestinian liberation and statehood were necessary and possible in the eyes of the exiles in Kuwait speaks to the position of Palestinian workers and the smaller professional class: providing a backbone to the economy meant that limited political freedoms could be offered in return. As refugees from the Zionist project, the specific colonial relations experienced in Kuwait were for this period clearly different from the exclusivist notions of national identity pursued by the Jordanian state. (Massad 2001, 222) In short, the Palestinian refugee community was “culturally and socially dynamic”, expressed in education, performance, women's rights and, crucially, through the available political space to support the national struggle. (Al-Nakib 2015) But if the raising of national sentiment was so necessary - and I believe this to be true - it is revealing that the cultural experiences of Reem, the Palestinian children and a conceivable majority of the community were so diverse and, largely, non-Palestinian.

Reem's childhood reminiscences offer a window into the multi-faceted meanings of musical and cultural experience for the Palestinian refugees in Kuwait. In this chapter's musical survey, I have referenced Palestinian folklore, Kuwaiti *sawt*, Cairo and its regional influence, Rahbani Lebanon, US Billboard, Broadway and a range of film musics. This broadness of listening had specificities to the cultured tastes of Reem's parents and to the Palestinian diaspora more broadly, but others who lived in Kuwait during the 1960s-80s likewise report a diversity of musical transmission.¹⁴⁹ I connect this cosmopolitanism with Kuwait's international position, reflecting the global and regional balance of politico-economic forces. Following British occupation, Kuwait vacillated between non-allignment and the US economic sphere, while the socialist bloc had a subtler impact on cultural life in Arab societies. Kuwait's position in the world had a unique bearing on its musical sphere and on Kuwait's largest minority population.

Elsewhere, Edward Said charts post-/anti-colonial developments in literature, discussing the interdependence of cultural forms. When exile almost becomes a “new norm”, he writes,

¹⁴⁹ Musician Tarik Beshir lived in Kuwait from 1978-1990 and remembers his musical exposure as being “like a kid in a sweet shop”, featuring Umm Kulthum, Riad al-Sunbati, Michael Jackson and Madonna. (Discussion with the author, November 2017)

“Newly changed models and types jostle against the older ones.” (1994, 384) There are correlations here expressed in the music of specific artists. Reem reports that the children thought Fairuz was Palestinian and that, by extension, she was a singer of Palestinian music. Yet here was a musical genre that was not so much traditional as *traditionalised*, also referencing France, Russia and a range of “outside” influences. Although the music at the Sulaibikhat swimming club was more nakedly Western, this was a period when official state policy directed a focus on specifically Kuwaiti and Arab musics. But there was no singularly dominating form of music. Due to its momentary political independence from British imperialism, and of course to the oil boom, Kuwait's elite were able to sponsor a level of cultural opportunity that heightened the uniqueness of Kuwait as a location for Palestinian refugees, as the “touristic entertainment” programme showed.

Alongside Reem's cosmopolitan experience, Palestinian tradition existed and thrived in the home through her *aghani mama*, mother's songs; this experience was by no means unique to Kuwait. I will return in more detail in the next chapter to wedding songs but it should be noted here that a key part of the way that Reem learned this nationally referential material is that she did so casually. Not all of the music in her early repertoire had this informal quality to it - it was not all *za'atar w zeit*, or as “natural” as traditional cookery - and by contrast the adoption of Fairuz by the nationalist movement, by the school and by Kuwaiti state TV expressed a more organised form of transmission for Reem's singing. But the orality of folkloric songs represented a kind of informal transmission that pointed to a real, as opposed to an imagined, historical connection to Palestine. For Tölölyan, it is “above all the writers, musicians and artists who produce high and low cultural commodities that underpin diasporic identity.” (1996, 19) In terms of Reem's own development as a Palestinian artist, her mother Yusra was an important figure and had learned the music herself in Palestine before 1948.

In triggering the colonial relations experienced by the Kuwait-based Palestinians, therefore, Israel did not fully succeed in the mission of colonialist regimes as outlined by Fanon, in distorting, disfiguring or destroying the past of the oppressed people. (1963, 169) Nor did the Kuwaiti state seek to stamp out expressions of Palestinian culture in that moment. This meant that Palestinians in Sulaibikhat engaged in a process taking place in other locations, where Julianne Hammer sees subsequent generations as key to the continuation of the narrative: “The oral tradition, stories, and memories of the Palestinian past play a crucial role in educating them, inside as well as outside Palestine.” (Hammer 2005, 43) The transmission of songs could

be likened to a process of “historical reconstruction” whereby the narrative gained oppositional content in the context of Palestinian dispossession. (Connerton 1989, 14)

Musically speaking, Kuwait was the site of a particular blend of sounds and cultural presentations that made up a wider performance scene. But what framed this experience for the Palestinians was that the ruling elite saw the interests of the national liberation movement as connected to its own. In other words, it did not, for the time being, see any reason to repress the materials of Palestinian national expression. Despite the fact that most Palestinians remained second class citizens in Kuwait in terms of their temporary worker status, denial of education rights and alienation from the levers of political power, their indigenous culture was not allowed to “rot” on the margins of European culture,¹⁵⁰ as Aime Cesaire claims is the destiny of colonised peoples. (Juneja 1995, 25) On the contrary, for Turino, “nationalism emerges from cosmopolitanism”, a term he uses in place of “global”, to mean cultural formations that are both local and translocal. (2000, 13)

I would argue that in discussing Reem Kelani’s childhood, two distinct forms of nationalism shaped her experience - the progressive demand for Palestinian national liberation and the elite brand of post-independence nationalism represented by the Kuwaiti rulers. Massad's discussion on the “new culture” of post-independence Jordan expresses the *traditionalised* approach of the national bourgeoisie. (2001, 7) The state-sponsorship of Kuwaiti *sawt* may fit this description but then so, also, might the adoption of Fairuz by the different class forces that made up the Palestinian exile community. These forms coexisted with in a broadly cosmopolitan scene. However, tolerance of the Palestinian cause would come up against the limits of national and international power relations.

Her father's professional position had been a catalyst for Reem's taste for artistic exploration. Yusuf's ability to traverse the world and the space given to this professional group despite their position as non-citizens pointed to other phenomena among the refugee intelligentsia. In the post-*Nakba* years, key figures in the resurgent Palestinian liberation movement worked and began to organise in Kuwait, including Yasser Arafat, Khalil Al Wazir (Abu Jihad), Hani El Hassan, Salah Khalaf (Abu Eyad) and first PLO chair Ahmed Al-Shukairi, who in 1964

¹⁵⁰ Mattelart writes that the “idea of a monolithic, triumphant imperialism, wiping out all diversity and homogenising all cultures is absurd... The idea that imperialism invades different sectors of a society in a uniform way must be abandoned.” (1969, 61)

expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti foreign minister for his stay. (El-Najjar 2001) Yet for most Palestinians the journey of exile was no easy one. Kuwait is a central theme of the work of Kanafani, a teacher and journalist in Kuwait from 1955 until his departure in 1960 to join George Habash's *al-Hurriyya* journal. Kanafani's writings while in Kuwait express the frustrations and sorrows of exile, illustrated later in the graphic *Men in the Sun*, giving a glimpse of the life-threatening dangers faced by those who had taken the road to Kuwait in the first place – this literature was based on the very real experiences of poor Palestinians. (Ghabra 1988) Looked at retrospectively, Kuwaiti writer Mai Al-Nakib sees in the pages of Kanafani's work a diagnosis ignored by her compatriots in the years after 1991:

“his actual presence in Kuwait in the second half of the 1950s expresses an early promise of Kuwait as an open and cosmopolitan place soon betrayed and today mostly forgotten.” (2015)

This concept of a cosmopolitanism betrayed is missing from the Reem Kelani story, which focuses on the, at times, huge opportunities afforded her during childhood. But the massive repression meted out to the Palestinians in the wake of the Gulf War of 1990-91 showed that the Kuwaiti state was not benevolent.¹⁵¹ The Kuwait of today retains a cosmopolitan and *sha'bi* cultural scene (Alouzman 2009), but for Palestinians during the crisis, what would openness and the space to organise amount to if such privileges could be taken away and replaced with torture and displacement?¹⁵² What did independence mean if Kuwait was to become a US colony? Perhaps today it means the memories of Sulaibikhat, both happy and tragic, in the childhood of a Palestinian exile. But beyond reminiscence, the influence of this period is present in Reem's current musicianship and was the springboard for her experience of Palestinian weddings, the subject of our next chapter.

¹⁵¹ There are relevant links here to the criminalisation of Kurdish organisations in Germany, increasingly the subject of state repression for supporting 'extremism'. (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003)

¹⁵² Toufic Hadad reports on the scapegoating of the Palestinians by the Kuwaiti regime. The majority of the estimated 4,000 killed and 16,000 detained and tortured by state forces during the Gulf War were Palestinians; figures also include Iraqis, Yemenis and Sudanese. (2010)

Chapter 4: Two Palestinian weddings

Through a discussion of Reem Kelani's early life, the previous chapter showed that Kuwait offered a degree of cultural and political opportunity in a unique and time-limited moment. Following the work of al-Nakib, I argued that in providing space for the Palestinians, the state was motivated by the interests of its ruling class, which ultimately proved fatal. I argued that the cosmopolitanism of music in Kuwait was a reflection of its position in the world, newly independent with vacillating elite interests. The social and geographical mobility of a professional section of the Palestinians meant that they stood to benefit. Continuing the discussion, this unique class position also gave them access to Palestine: physically as visiting exiles, and politically and culturally as temporary participants in a Palestinian life under occupation. The Kelani-Zoabi family were not well off enough to visit every summer but travelled to Palestine every two years.¹⁵³ In Nein, near her maternal home town of Nazareth, Reem attended her first "real" Palestinian wedding. Before that in Kuwait she had attended another kind of wedding, exemplified by US chart music that now makes her cringe. As the movement in Palestine took on insurrectionary character, however, the Kuwait-based Palestinians would rediscover their urge for nationalist-based celebration.

The issues covered in this chapter expand on the concept of cosmopolitanism and colonial relations hinted at previously with an examination of the changing face of Palestinian weddings. The two examples offered by Reem raise questions on the form taken by *sumud* in exile and in Palestine; we also briefly get a feel for the class associations of two forms of highly contrasting wedding presentation in Kuwait. Drawing on Singh and Tölölyan, I suggest that the Palestinian exile community did not, however, act as a simple "weather vane" to events at home, but that cultural and political phenomena were interlinked and multidirectional. Via an analysis of *sumud* poetics, drawing on Caton and Palestinian writer Sbait, I assess the degree to which the celebrations were expressions of "becoming Palestinian" (to borrow a phrase from Jenkins' work on the Kurds). Reem's interview material also references the role of gender in

¹⁵³ Writing in 1988, Ghabra points out that: "The entire Palestinian population visits the West Bank or Gaza at one time or another, since the majority still have relatives there. Although visits are short (they are not allowed by the military authorities to stay more than a month or two), they have far-reaching effects on the family. The children develop familiarity with the village. Their roots, suddenly and for the first time, take on a concrete form. When they have heard about the land, the Israelis, and the occupation becomes real and close."

wedding performances: if her mother had introduced her to wedding song at an early age, two male singers shaped her experience of Palestinian weddings. In this context I draw on the poetic tradition but also reference the important work of Rhoda Kanaaneh on reproductive relations in Palestine. I argue that Reem's narrative puts women at the centre of the transmission process, asking whether Reem's later inclusion of this traditional material in her work as a performer actually served to formalise a process of transmission that had appeared to be casual with her mother and other refugees. I conclude this chapter with a survey of some of the material covered in Reem's concerts.

4.1 Nothing but feelings - the changing face of Palestinian weddings in Kuwait

Song material from the Palestinian wedding, and particularly its traditional vocal elements, have become central features of the stage show and recorded output of different Reem Kelani bands. As will be seen later in this chapter, the stories behind the transmission of these materials are also utilised in her artistic presentation, through humorous anecdotes, evocative sleeve notes, interview material and by other methods of oral history. But despite the fact that Reem sees Kuwait as such a proud part of her personal history, and one which appears in her stage narrative, it is interesting that she has not spoken at any length publicly about her early experience of Kuwait-based Palestinian weddings. Our first section of this chapter will therefore look into the implications of one “cosmopolitan” form of wedding, referential to its time, location and class-based references.

In 1960s-1970s Kuwait, a typical wedding for a couple from a Palestinian professional background consisted of a hotel venue, suits and ties and, musically, either Western pop or “*Lebanese* Arabic music” (Reem's emphasis). While the latter, Reem says, refers to the Lebanese pop of Walid Toufic, famed for his Arabic/English version of Happy Birthday, Reem focuses on the Western element. One particular song from the Transatlantic pop charts sums up the experience:

“[Sings:] ‘Feelings, nothing more than feelings; Trying to...’ We used to make jokes about Palestinian weddings that didn’t have this song for the bride and groom to dance to. Do you

remember that song? Terrible! Oh my god! ...I'm being honest with you... the weddings I'd been to... bleurgh!"¹⁵⁴

The offending object was *Feelings*, a 1975 song by one-hit-wonder Morris Albert.¹⁵⁵ In soft rock style, Albert croons over steel-string acoustic guitar, brushed drums, faux-jazz piano and sustained strings. The “whoa-oa-oa” chorus marked it out as a singalong hit but it is the melodramatic emotion of its verse lyrics that perhaps best encapsulates its global use as a mid-70s wedding dance. The “teardrops rolling down on my face, trying to forget my feelings of love” marked Albert as being part of what Frank Zappa called “the intensive care contingent of the rock world”. (1992) In the promo video Albert, cleanly shaved with coiffed hair, wistfully grimaces while singing the words to *Feelings*, wearing a pinstriped suit with open collar and gold chain - he could easily be singing at a wedding party were he not so tragically beset with sadness. His lyrics also seem out of place:

I wish I've never met you, girl
You'll never come again

Curious, then, that the song became such a hit with Palestinian wedding organisers in Kuwait, although Reem's later encounter with the “Big Mamas” in Lebanon is perhaps indicative of a certain masochism when it comes to emotional lyrics on mourning and separation. Arab and US listeners were probably unaware of Morris Albert's own identity as a Brazilian.¹⁵⁶ For the Palestinian middle class, Albert was for all intents and purposes an American; as indeed he was for Western audiences, for whom his ethnicity was downplayed in commercial artwork and material connected to the single release. *Feelings* was the record all their weddings had to have - Reem suggests that others would joke about the ones that didn't.

¹⁵⁴ Interview in London, 1 July 2016.

¹⁵⁵ While *Feelings* made the top 10 in US and UK charts, Albert's subsequent single *Sweet Loving Man* didn't reach those dizzy heights, hitting #76 on the US Billboard Chart. (Allmusic 2018)

¹⁵⁶ Albert's background wasn't reflected in his music, which was indistinguishable from the mainstream of US pop. But what mattered more was the experience. The lyrics point to betrayal that belied its use as a song for the bride and groom's first dance. Such betrayal underlined the experience of many musicians in the US/UK music business, and particularly those with black or ethnic minority backgrounds. It also pointed to the treacherous existence faced by the performers of some one hit wonders who faced instant success and immediate obscurity. “You'll never come again.” It was a dog eat dog world. This exploitative relation has been examined particularly in relation to jazz. (Kofsky 1998)

At a time when the resurgent Palestinian national movement was not yet seen as a direct threat to the Kuwaiti state, in the years before the *Intifada* and before the escalation of war in Lebanon, there existed a space in the Kuwaiti public sphere for a cultural sociality where the ostensibly harmless pull of North American commercialism would be embraced by a section of Palestinians. For upwardly mobile professionals in Kuwait's boom years, ideals towards a certain standard of living extended to the cultural sphere, meaning a concept of modernisation entwined with Westernisation.¹⁵⁷ The economic crisis of the early 1980s hit Palestinian families hard, with rent skyrocketing and, Ghabra argues, bringing the community together. (1988) But despite the creeping hardships of exile, their gaze focused on events back home during the *Intifada* years:

“So yes, I was in Kuwait and I mentioned this before, when the *Intifada* began, of course in Kuwait there were fundraisers left, right and centre. Many Palestinian women, middle class or what have you, started showing pride and wearing the Palestinian dress, the *thob*. Whereas until then they would say ‘*fellahi*’, peasant [sneeringly], so that became... you would wear it on any formal occasion, your traditional costume. And then that’s when Palestinian weddings changed. They still stayed in hotels! But instead of “Feelings...” they started having a proper Palestinian *zaffeh*, wedding procession, and wonderful Palestinian young men dancers, who would always be the ones dancing at the workers' club for working class Palestinians, suddenly they started getting these wonderful gigs. And one of them, Ibrahim Shteivi became my *dabke* teacher, wonderful guy, I’m still in touch with him. So everything changed, even the manifestation of Palestinian cultural resistance changed. Cookery lessons on Palestinian food and, again, the Kuwaiti Union of Women was incredibly active and it was from them that I learned how to become an activist.”

Affirming “I’m talking about middle class professionals” when discussing this genre of wedding, Reem's narrative of the changes underway in the 80s suggest that the less well-off Palestinians had held traditional weddings at the Workers' Club (“the famous *Nadi al-Ummal*”), although she couldn’t be sure: “because I’m the daughter of a doctor, a middle class Palestinian, we never went there, we knew nothing about it.” Nevertheless, it can be deduced that new social interactions brought with them public expressions of Palestinian cultural heritage that had been more or less absent in her experience in Kuwait, particularly when it

¹⁵⁷ While often taking on Western cultural influences, Armbrust underlines the idea that modernism in the Egypt is not “radiated from Europe”, rather carrying place and time-specific characteristics in national(ist) projects in formerly colonised countries. (1999)

came to weddings. Dance, cookery, clothing and music were all re-traditionalised as the cultural workers of the *Nadi al-Ummal* were brought to the hotels and social spaces of a radicalised professional class. As Turino suggests cosmopolitan cultural practices are revealing of the global interests at play in a given arena. (2000, 10) In the Palestinian case, many objects of Western culture were appropriated locally in the social spaces of the exiles. The re-emergence of Palestinian nationalism undermined certain qualities in the form of cosmopolitanism adopted by this community.

Weddings are frequently sites of national identification, traditionalist-modernist engagement and of socio-political struggle. Siapno writes of the marginalisation of traditional weddings in Aceh as urban-based elites “modernise” and replace traditional music performances with karaoke. (2002, 112) In the Greek Cypriot case, Ioannidou sees efforts for musical revival as:

“an effective and conscious reaction to the social changes and continuous national threats. They might also be the means of bringing people together, by reviving the ‘old culture’ and giving them the feeling of security.” (2017, 257)

While the processes taking place in the Palestinian wedding in 1980s Kuwait may express responses to Israeli repression in occupied Palestine – and, indeed, to a lack of secure tenure for Palestinians in Kuwait in the fourth decade after the *Nakba* – Caton’s description of weddings in Yemen suggest that binaries often proliferate simultaneously: “between urban and nonurban, sayyid [“notable” or “noble” – LB] and tribal, modern and traditional, male and female, and northern and southern Yemeni.” (2013, 195) It may not be the case, then, that there is a simple struggle between trends and approaches. In Kuwait alone, it seems clear that there were at least two distinctive brands of Palestinian wedding.

Tölölyan builds on the arguments of Gurharpal Singh on the interplay between homeland and diaspora, agreeing that:

“we must be careful of presuming that new political winds originate predominantly from one and blow to the other. It is never clear *a priori*, he points out, whether diasporas are the new wind or merely the weathervane responding to storms generated in the homeland.” (2012)

The example of the changing face of Palestinian weddings with the onset of the *Intifada* era suggests that these winds blow within and between class and social groups in exile, as well as in relation to Palestine. My reading of Reem Kelani's narrative suggests that, while better off exiles led the political movement and supported the *Intifada* financially, the Palestinian working class was a driving force for the winds of revolutionary nationalism in Kuwait, influenced of course by events on the ground in Palestine and exerting a level of mutual influence a wider community which had turned to a “modern”, US-influenced brand of wedding. If Silverman sees contemporary Romani musicians as offering “a critique of the paradigm of universalizing modernity” (Buchanan 2007, 338), then perhaps the working class Palestinians in Kuwait offered a pole of steadfastness in the face of the West-leaning cultural processes reflected in middle class wedding ceremonies. A form of *sumud*-as-critique refracted back upon the more comfortable Palestinians, who re-embraced certain traditions as the Palestine-based movement of the 1980s gathered pace.¹⁵⁸

This traditionalist response to cosmopolitanism at decisive political moments in the Palestinian story has parallels in other areas of national culture, such as the celebration of land, *dabke* or embroidery; Chapter 6 on Saied Silbak references such trends among Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. Elsewhere, poetic tradition is used as a way of reminding listeners of the nation's past greatness, with the objective “of retribalizing and retraditionalizing the country”. (Caton 1993, 231) For others, maintaining tradition is linked with national survival, in Kurdish or Filipino migrant groups for example. (Emery 2015; Oreiro 2014) Yet traditionalism and cosmopolitanism are not so far removed and as easily defined as appearances may sometimes suggest. I suggest that traditional ideas manifested in “cosmopolitan” forms in the music of Reem Kelani are also present with Palestinian artists Shafik Kabha, Ibrahim Sbehat or El-Funoun. Our next section will look at another window to the process for Palestinians in Kuwait. Curiously, throughout the years of the “nothing but feelings” wedding, many Kuwait-based Palestinians returned to their home towns and villages as visitors. For Reem this meant attending her first “real” Palestinian wedding near her maternal city of Nazareth.

¹⁵⁸ In Zimbabwe Turino sees the participatory traditions in Shona society as offering “important alternative models for enriching life and community in places where presentational and recorded forms of music have become the predominant, or at least the most highly valued, modes – as in the modernist-capitalist formation.” (58, 2000) It is notable here that, as in other examples, it is the poor or rural population, rather those of the urban, “modern” centres, that are seen as carrying tradition. In Arab music, debates have raged over whether *fellahin* are the bearers of authentic national or Arab artistry. (Shannon 2009, 89) Descriptions of Umm Kulthum as a *bint al-rif* or “country girl” served to highlight what was seen as her traditionally Egyptian attributes of modesty, religiosity and high-level artistry. (Danielson 1997, 133)

4.2 Return - national identity, *sumud* and the Palestinian wedding

The previous chapter surveyed the vastness of cultural experience for a young Palestinian girl growing up in 1960s-70s Kuwait. Following on from the literature discussed on cosmopolitanism, the Kuwait-based wedding showed that, amidst the Westernising and modernising trends among the exiled middle class, in times of politicisation the Palestinian refugee wedding was pulled towards national identification. But if this process was blown by political winds in multiple directions, to borrow the analogy used by Singh and Tölölyan, quite different forms had characterised the cultural experiences of those who remained in the Palestinian homeland. Many Palestinians in Kuwait were, during the period of Reem's childhood, able to visit and participate in another form of Palestinian wedding. I will further examine the Palestine wedding as a site of national belonging and *sumud*, with heightened significance for the visiting exiles. A far cry from “nothing but feelings”, the event of revelation described by Reem in her trip to Palestine is, I argue, a two-way transaction involving emotional and political connections between the homeland and the *shatat*. I will then move on to discussing the gender connotations of the two forms of weddings.

At the age of nine, Reem and her siblings were taken on a summer trip to see the family:

“We were visiting Nazareth, the city, and my aunt said, ‘you’re invited to a wedding tonight, you’re gonna love it Reem, have you ever been to a Palestinian wedding?’ I said, well, yeah, the ones in Kuwait. I didn’t realise, I thought we were going to a hotel. And then she said, ‘no, no, no, it’s in the village, there’s no invitation, everybody comes.’ [I thought] ‘What’s she talking about?’”¹⁵⁹

The wedding took place in the central square in the village of Nein, attended by hundreds of locals. Proceedings were “quasi formal... but when the strangers leave, the boys and girls start dancing, it's incredible.” Even by her own standards Reem is animated as she remembers the smell of the food, the multiple dress changes of the bride, modestly dressed old ladies and people exuberantly throwing rice into the air. It was she says “one of the happiest days of my life.” Reem's description of the music sung during the ceremonies is, initially, unspecific,

¹⁵⁹ Interview in London, 1 July 2016.

referencing the casual and organic qualities of its presentation as women in their sixties and seventies stood around the bride, leading the singing and clapping along:

“Nobody *said* it was traditional Palestinian music and song. It wasn’t magnified... The women sang the most amazing things... And although they were modest, they were so sensuous in the way they were singing.”

“...And then at the end of the wedding something really finished me off. The old men stand up and they close the ceremony with their dance. And the dance was so non-technical yet severely profound. So there wasn’t a lot of acrobatics, they are men in their eighties and nineties, but the profundity of it, Canaanite... There was something mountainous and graceful about it. In 1972 I was barely nine, come to think of it... I was a kid! And to see these old guys...”

“And then a male singer came and grabbed the microphone and he started what now we call *el-hadi* or *el-hadda*, sung poems, and he just looked at our nuclear family, mum and dad and sang, ‘*w salmo ‘ala haahil Kuwaitu; ya halali ya mali...*’ [“and salaam to this family from Kuwait...”] and they started saluting the people who had come from Kuwait. It felt incredible and I was thinking, ‘I’m not Kuwaiti but I have come from Kuwait’. There is an area of Kuwait where most Palestinians live - we didn’t at the time, we lived in Sulaibikhat - its called al-Hawalli, and people would say, ‘ohh, he’s a Palestinian, he’s from Hawalli’, so how would this guy from Nazareth, still under military occupation, with no satellite and the big cultural gap... ‘*w ille Kuwaitu Hawalli; w ya halali...*’ [laughs] It felt wonderful and that old man was like the umbilical cord. That’s why I called my first album “Songs from the Motherland and Diaspora” [the subtitle to *Sprinting Gazelle*]. It’s to bring that moment to life again. I felt, ‘ah, my two existences are not separate.’ Because this guy who doesn’t even know where Kuwait is saluted us. And how does *he* know that the Palestinians are in Hawalli? [laughs] I’ll never forget that, it was an amazing day and I learned a lot from that wedding. That’s another epiphany.”

Reem’s elation at the day’s events had come full circle. First came the “incredible” feeling of her state of exile being recognised by those who led the ceremony in Palestine. And finally in the realisation that there was a profound connection, an “umbilical cord” between Kuwait and the homeland. While Reem had until this point and after expressed her sense of loyalty to the place of her upbringing, she had always known she was Palestinian, not Kuwaiti. The summer escape to Galilee reaffirmed this point but the experience of the wedding in Nein shaped her understanding of what being Palestinian meant as an exile, a refugee. She had occupied a dual

position - a Palestinian girl in a non-Palestinian environment. Sure, her mother rolled *labaneh* balls and sang at home; sure her childhood friends were also exiles; sure she'd learned about the motherland through the holy Fairuz/Rahbani songbook. But here in Palestine it was a musical experience that allowed her understanding to transcend into a wholeness.

McDonald notes that, "The Palestinian wedding is perhaps the most powerful social space in which conceptions of nation are defined, redefined, and transmitted", holding particular significance for exiles towards historic origins and preservation of communities. (2010, 111) Reference to such diverse examples as Aceh and Cyprus shows that many of these characteristics are unexclusive to the Palestinian case.¹⁶⁰ While oral transmission in particular has marked a continuation with weddings in pre-1948 Palestine, it would not be out of place to suggest that the maintenance of Palestinian traditional forms has been spurred on by Zionist colonial violence and attempted erasure of historic Palestine.¹⁶¹

More or less contemporaneous with Reem's attendance at the Nein wedding, a 1977 diary entry by Hatim Kanaaneh reports of repression in the nearby town of Arrabeh: "imams in mosques and folk singers at village weddings are being interrogated and even jailed by the Shin Bet for making traditional pronouncements that have nationalistic overtones." (2008, 4) Palestinian weddings are also documented as sites of repression in Jordan, where official national concepts of tradition are formed in opposition to those of the Palestinian minority. (Massad 2001, 254) Discussing the Kurds in Turkey in reference to Jenkins' writing on "moments of becoming Kurdish", (1996, 2) Sunata sees the maintenance of customs in music, weddings and language in the context of rising Turkish nationalism, extremist violence and state criminalisation of Kurdish communities.¹⁶² Nationalism in the cultural material of oppressed groups is, I argue, both responsive to and steadfast in the face of hostile forces.

¹⁶⁰ While Buchanan (2006) and others have focused on nation consciousness in the weddings of Balkan states, I have in this thesis sought something of a separation from certain comparisons with the "nation building" project in post-socialist Europe, viewing such phenomena as extremely problematic and at odds with the position of Palestine as an oppressed nation.

¹⁶¹ Swedenburg also refers to examples of British military incursions into weddings during its suppression of the 1936-39 Palestinian revolt. (2003, 164; 168)

¹⁶² Examples given by Sunata include Kurds being beaten or attacked for singing Kurdish songs. "in the case of seventeen year old E.C. who was beaten by a group for singing a Kurdish song, Istanbul Usküdar Children Bureau [of the Police] sent him to prosecution for "*being sympathizer of PKK and provoking the population*". Many communal attacks against Kurdish workers ended up with victims being investigated by the police and their displacement to other cities." (2016, 144)

In contradistinction to the Kuwaiti experience, the work of the *zajjal* offered new representations of Palestine. The vehicle was the *hadda*, a form of improvised-sung folk poetry based on lines of two, four or eight lines and sung in the *bayati maqam*. In his work on improvised debate in the extemporising-singing of several poetic genres in Palestinian weddings, Dirgham Sbait describes the “unlimited” choice of themes, ranging from love to politics and defines the “hadi or hadda (lit. “cameleer singer,” colloquially [as] a poet who sings *hida*, the most popular genre of Palestinian improvised-sung poetry)”. (1993)

Musically, in its traditional form, the genre is characterised by the freedom of the singer to set and change the rhythmic tempo, with the crowd clapping along and taking cues to sing the simple refrain, usually *ya halali, ya mali*.

“As the wedding guests sit down to drink and eat, the poet-singers entertain them with suitable sung-poetry. The audience participates by singing refrains introduced by the poet-singers, and in some cases the performances are accompanied by professional musicians. However, when the serious poetic debate begins the audience listens carefully to the poet-singers’ arguments, repeats the refrains after them, and enjoys the performance... Poetic debate in the *hida* genre is the most elaborate and complex type, and forms the climax of the groom’s evening party. The poet-singers warm up with other types of *hida*, and when the *sahjih* dancers and the audience are totally attentive they switch to the serious and exciting debate.” (Sbait 1993)

While Reem does not describe the singers’ interventions with direct reference to any debate, it seems fair to say that the presence of the “Kuwaiti” Palestinians was picked up on by those attending and leading the ceremonies, provoking certain thought processes and reactions. The singer’s embrace of the Kelani family spoke to principles of *sumud*, a prominent theme in *hida* poetry.¹⁶³ The common refrain, “*ya halali, ya mali*,” is translated in Sbait’s work as, “Oh, how delighted I am!”¹⁶⁴ While this may be equivalent in conveying the enraptured chorus of guests

¹⁶³ Sbait’s account includes lines from the poet-singers Muhammad and Qasim al-Asadi, promising to “never yield to humiliation” and expressing hope for the return of Palestinian refugees.

¹⁶⁴ Singer Ibrahim Sbehat explains that the meaning of the phrase goes back over 200 years and is thought to come from the story of a Palestinian farmer who had money and sheep but lost all he had when thieves took them from him. According to the tale he wandered the streets shouting “*ya halali ya mali*”, which in this case meant “my sheep my money”, and little children chased behind him shouting the same phrase. (Discussion with the author, December 2015) This story is told to children in Gaza today. (Discussion with youth worker Rashid Anbar, March 2018)

at a wedding/circumcision/party, alternative translations are, “my riches are my own” or “what I have is mine by right.”¹⁶⁵

Viewed this way, these lyrics – and those sung to the Kelani family – may be heard differently. Rather than being “just” proclamations of celebration, they are statements of national pride and ownership of the riches of the land. When he sang “*ya halali, ya mali*” the vocalist claimed Reem and her group as his own family, and encouraged the chorus of attendees to do the same; the refugees are here part of the *halal*, the blessed riches of Palestine. Elsewhere in the Arab world, poets are traditionally held in high esteem for their depth of knowledge regarding both artistic ability and contemporary insight; *qasida* singers in Yemen are “distinguished by knowledge of the genre but also by their designated role of social commentator.” (Caton 1990, 54) Reem’s surprise that the singer knew of the areas in Kuwait where the Palestinian refugees resided offers a parallel. In other examples the Palestinian *zajjal* celebrates the return of resistance fighters (Swedenburg 2003, 131), political prisoners and travelers.¹⁶⁶

The process of politicisation, or nationalisation, of Palestinian weddings is not a recent phenomenon, with reports of politically-charged wedding mobilisations during as early as the 1930s (Khalidi 2007, 125; Soukarieh 2000, 80–81) For McDonald, “Weddings were sites of intense nation building, to be sure, but so-called resistance or nationalist music flowed freely between social spaces. Protest songs were sung at weddings as often as wedding songs were sung at protests, if such a distinction could even be made.” (2013, 4) Reem does not report of having attended any protests in her childhood but her descriptions of the school performance of Fairuz (Chapter 3) and of the wedding in Nein point to the fact that her multifaceted cultural experience within and beyond weddings in Kuwait took place alongside a deepening movement towards Palestinian national self-determination.

Turino sees nationalism and cosmopolitanism as “parallel cultural effects of colonialism” (2000, 4), defining musical nationalism as “the conscious use of any preexisting or newly created music in the service of a political nationalist movement”. (2000, 190) Narrating the wedding in Nein, Reem’s presentation suggests that the process was unconscious. Nobody told

¹⁶⁵ The refrain also features in the vocals of “MC Hadda”, Walaa Sbait, for the project Ministry of Dub-Key, drawing on reggae and linking Palestine to trends in international black culture and notions of liberation. (Karkabi 2018)

¹⁶⁶ The song *Klappa Dina Händer* (“Clap your Hands”) by the Palestinian-Swedish band Kofia is a celebration of dance and merriment with the return of a jailed husband. (1976)

her that this was Palestinian traditional music, she says, emphasising the “Cannanite” qualities of the performance. I suggest that the reality hovers somewhere in between this and Turino's formula - that the national movement was built as a force of will, but at the same time the act of *sumud* was not the product of mere ideological construction. For the refugees in and beyond Kuwait, preserving such memories were a way of life and a method of survival. (Feldman 2006) That this wedding made such a clear impression on Reem was the outcome of living through what was in reality a precarious and temporary state of refuge in the Gulf kingdom. Her claim of having “next best thing” to living in Palestine could be read as a statement that Kuwait was a shelter from the more open repression happening in other Arab states, but her words also gave the Nein wedding credit for being a site of ecstatic celebration in an occupied land.

Her sense that this event was a revelation or an “epiphany”, a word she uses twice in this context, pointed not necessarily to the discovery of what Palestine and a “real” Palestinian wedding were like, but also chimed with her own life. Her mother's singing of folkloric wedding material in the kitchen whilst rolling *labaneh* was an image in keeping with a broader tradition of *sumud* in Palestinian exile communities. Tölölyan's concepts of “diasporic discourse” refers to intellectuals and scholars (1996, 59), which surely existed among Palestinians in Kuwait – from where the Palestinian nationalist movement was rebuilt – but there were also crucially important forms of grassroots discourse with Palestine. To the extent that *sumud* was a form of resistance, therefore, the Kelanis were participants in the struggle.¹⁶⁷

4.3 Umbilical cords and gender in transmission

The climactic moment in Reem's narrative of the Nein wedding surrounds the male *zajjal* performer singing directly to the Kuwait-based Palestinians, welcoming them as family members and initiating Reem into a closely conceived national community. Men and women are described as playing particular roles encompassed rather deliberately in Reem's choice of

¹⁶⁷ McDonald sees weddings as linked to “diffuse notions of “resistance”, echoing his point on the “so-called resistance or nationalist music”. While he points to the difficulty of drawing a distinction between songs sung at weddings and protests, he nevertheless draws a false distinction between resistance (usually in parenthesis) and *sumud*. While Khalili sees *sumud* narratives as the “least confrontational framing of a coherent past” she also points to its complexity, its use as a policy of resistance and quotes several figures in the movement to point to its principles as a refusal to submit. (2007, 101)

metaphors. In this brief section I draw on the works of a range of writers to analyse the role of gender in the transmission of Palestinian wedding music. Returning to the changing political situation experienced by the exiles towards the years of the *Intifada*, I argue that women have played a leading role in narrating folkloric tradition under conditions of colonial displacement compounded by an unfinished revolution in gender equality.

In this chapter I have discussed two contrasting wedding experiences in Reem's childhood. Two figures stand out for different reasons: in the case of the Nein wedding, an elderly Palestinian *zajjal*, and in the first example, the US chart singer Albert Morris. The form of wedding characterised by Morris' "Feelings" is remembered by Reem for its cringeworthy qualities, but there is no doubting that Morris' singing made a lasting impression on her memory. Despite having never stepped foot in Kuwait nor having any connection to the tradition – or maybe, for the upwardly mobile Palestinians, because of it – Morris was the *zajjal* of the earliest weddings Reem attended. Interestingly, however, his name is never mentioned by Reem and there is a notable lack of detail to her narrative choices towards the leading participants in the wedding. When Palestine is the location, things are different. The *zajjal* may be unnamed but is given scenic description as he and other old men dance "profoundly" and "gracefully" as Reem evokes the mountains and the times of the Canaanites.¹⁶⁸ While Morris may not have had wider regional relevance, here were men with sturdy roots in the land. As far as Reem was concerned the *zajjal* himself was "like the umbilical cord" between her and Palestine.

This metaphor is interesting in the Palestinian case and deserves attention. Images of birth, conception, pregnancy and reproduction are littered through decades of national poetic and political literary output. (e.g. Darwish 2007, 185; Joudah 2013) Metaphorical umbilical cords are evoked to connect villages, displaced populations and shared histories. (Doumani 1995, 56) Drawing on Freud, Massad hints that this process is an opposite pole to Zionist colonialist attempts to "retrieve" the memory of the nation, alongside a drive by Israeli politicians towards "creating geographic simulacra which informs Israeli state policies". (2006, 36) This direct reference to physical geography suggests that reproductive references, far from being imagined

¹⁶⁸ Nur Masalha reveals that "the Old Testament terms 'Canaanites' and 'Israelites' in Palestine do not necessarily refer to or describe two distinct ethnicities" and were terms "imaginatively coined" by religio-ideological figures outside of Palestine. In the modern era, "European Zionist leaders appropriated the Old Testament narrative as historical accounts and used them instrumentally to justify their settler project and their conflict with the indigenous people of Palestine." (2018, 57)

products, are tied to material phenomena and political processes.¹⁶⁹ The role of the *zajjal* in Nein did not evoke birth himself, but Reem's process of recollection evokes a strong link between his intervention and the revelation that she and her group were part of the Palestinian family in Galilee, despite living in Kuwait. According to Ginsburg and Rapp, reproduction can carry profound insight as an "entry point to the study of social life." (1995, 1) From this starting point Rhoda Kanaaneh analyses reproduction in the Palestinian Galilee as a central site for negotiating modernisation and national questions in the face of Orientalist Israeli discourses that explicitly target and further marginalise Palestinians.¹⁷⁰ In this context, she argues:

"Reproduction has been politicized and maternity nationalized. Women's bodies are deeply inscribed as reproducers of the nation, whether by bearing few or many children. Family planning has become an essential new household economic strategy. The economization of family planning has emerged as both a set of practices of material acquisitiveness and a salient belief system." (Kanaaneh 2002, 22)

Metaphors on reproductivity are therefore not mere Freudian slips but are, I argue, reflective of wider issues in Palestinian experience. Furthermore, while the position of women in the leadership of the national movement is itself the subject of fierce critique,¹⁷¹ the relative position of men and women in Reem's Nein wedding narrative carries a different emphasis.

Tellingly, the *zajjaleen* do not sing the "*ya halali...*" refrain alone: in the *hadda*, all are expected to join in the callback response, encouraging Reem and the rest of the assembly to take part in a performance of Palestinian national identification and in expressing ownership of their heritage. There was a collectivity, therefore, at the heart of the music. Reem reports that her aunt initiated her into the event and draws up detailed sketches of the older women singers and

¹⁶⁹ The Freudian theory of complementarity links memory of architectural place to highly selective thought processes. (Freud 1946, 15-18) Interestingly then, that in Reem Kelani's narrative of weddings in Kuwait and Palestine, the only references to specific place - the workers' club (which she never entered) and the central village square in Nein - are left undetailed, with a focus on people, clothing and food.

¹⁷⁰ Kanaaneh's work further aims at the "disruption of the common and powerful stereotype of the passive and ignorant Third World woman." (2002, 256) The so-called "demographic timebomb", the object of right wing Zionist hysteria is discussed by Kanaaneh with reference to the Law of Return, Judaisation plans, census counts and health and family planning policies that invariably favour Jews over native Palestinians.

¹⁷¹ Massad reports that PLO documents referred to the land in gendered terms, normalising masculinity in the nationalist project, whilst ascribing to women the role of procreators, in forms that are traditionalised, rather than traditional. (2003, 42) In her paper *Palestinian Women: Fighting Two Battles*, Darraj lists issues faced by Palestinian women including fundamentalism, honor killings, occupation repression, distance-based obstruction and the 'Algeria factor' - the curtailing of women's rights after the victory of the revolution. (2014)

of the many dress changes of the bride; the groom, incidentally, is absent from the story.¹⁷² Looking beyond Reem's narrative of the wedding, her mother is described similarly in presenting the wedding music of historic Palestine. In both examples Reem is keen to stress the non-doctrinaire and seemingly more innate qualities of the way Palestinian music reached her. While the *zajjal* was an important piece, the umbilical cord, of her connection to Palestine, the wider narrative suggests a heightened role played by women, who Reem sees as possessing guardianship of transmission.¹⁷³

My suggestion is that the guardianship of this musical material by women has shaped Reem Kelani's narrative to the extent that Reem has herself taken on this ascribed role. In the final section of this chapter it will be shown that this role has become integral to Reem's processes of musicianship, including the research and performance of national traditions in wedding music. There is a clear connection between this position and the position of women in *sumud*, a process encompassing "everydayness" and "hanging on" in desperate times. (Khalidi 2007, 221) However it seems important to suggest that if *sumud* is resistance defined as not necessitating mobilisation or collective political action, the performance of wedding music may evade this categorisation. A further question to ask at this stage may be that, if its transmission has relied on an informality concurrent with colonial social relations, what form does wedding music take for a Palestinian transplanted to Britain?

4.4 "Oh gazelle of gazelles": wedding music onstage

In the twists and turns of history, the Palestinians in Kuwait would embrace a renaissance in national culture taking place in other exile locations, sending funds to the *Intifada* and rediscovering or reinventing *dabke* (see Karkabi 2018), dress and traditions in marriage

¹⁷² The nuances of gender within Reem's storytelling around the Nein visit overlap with arguments made by Shohat, in her review of the classic Khleifi film *Wedding in Galilee*, whose scenes "represent both the nurture of collective memory and the insistent, daily struggle for familial and national preservation; they provide glimpses of liberation while registering the impasses of patriarchal society. Palestinian women characters possess strong presence in Khleifi's films, in inverse proportion to their officially acknowledged place in the society he depicts." (Shohat 1988) This woman-centred approach chimes with other filmic representations of the Arab wedding. The wedding scene in Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1966) eschews conservative clothing for the bride Fatiha, signalling to the viewer "that the Algerian revolution is not an atavistic, religiously inspired rebellion, but a modern, secular challenge to colonial domination, whose program includes gender equality." (Evangelista 2011, 40)

¹⁷³ The wedding's focus on women is observed elsewhere. In Aceh, men are observed to play a somewhat passive role in traditional *peusijek* wedding ceremonies. (Siapno 2002, 111)

referencing rural Palestine.¹⁷⁴ But as shown in the previous chapter, the position of the exiles was finite, shaped by the loyalties of the regime as the Palestinian leadership took an unacceptable position. During this chapter I have argued that the notion of *sumud* was inherent in this temporary existence and have argued that Reem's narrative points to the pivotal role played by women in carrying national folklore to new generations. In this concluding section I trace the performance life of a wedding song that Reem describes as a trademark of her show,¹⁷⁵ from its position in the oral history of the Palestinian narrative, towards its presentation on record and at Reem Kelani concerts.

Introducing Sprinting Gazelle (“*Ah! Ya Reem al-Ghuzlaan*”) at the 22 November 2012 at the Tabernacle in West London,¹⁷⁶ Reem told the audience of how she learned the song:

“I was sitting in ‘Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp and this lovely refugee woman said, in Arabic, ‘What’s your name, praise be to the prophet?’ And I said, ‘My name is Reem.’ And she said, ‘Ah, I’ve got a song for you,’ and I said, ‘Okay mother, let’s hear it.’ And she sang,

Oh gazelle of all gazelles
I cried over our parting
And I’ll continue to cry over our parting
I’ve taken a vow of silence
I’ve forbidden myself from dancing the *dabke*
I dyed my clothes dark, and I’ve gone into mourning

And I said, ‘Nice. When do you sing these songs, mother?’ And she said, ‘We’re Palestinian. At weddings, of course.’” [Audience laughter]

It was a story Reem had told before and one which seems to define much of her philosophy on music and being Palestinian. The camp visit was in 1999, during which she also wrote of her experiences with singing women at Burj el-Barajneh refugee camp in southern Beirut. (Kelani

¹⁷⁴ As Swedenburg writes, identification of urban or middle class Palestinians could not be dismissed, but attest to the “affective power of the peasant as national signifier... in the context of the Palestinian confrontation with a specific form of settler-colonialism.” (1990, 18) However, the cultural scene for Palestinians remained multifaceted. The situation catapulted other Kuwait-based Palestinian singers to a level of regional and international success. Sima Kana’an and her band al-Fajr (The Dawn) apparently performed so many songs by the radical band Sabreen that some assumed she had written them.

¹⁷⁵ Concert at Rich Mix, Bethnal Green, 24 July 2014.

¹⁷⁶ Released as *Live at the Tabernacle* (2016). Reem’s words here are transcribed from the recording.

1999) Again hearing refrains of “*ya halali ya mali*”, Reem's dispatch ends optimistically: “People like Umm Muhammad [a refugee singer] make me believe in the possibility of regaining our *halal*.” The darkness of lyrics on loss and suffering gives way to celebration in performance - in her most recent liner notes to the song *Sprinting Gazelle*, Reem sees this as the essence of *sumud*: “a profound pain interlaced with ecstatic hope”. (Kelani 2016)

The lyrics continue on the theme of exile and yearning for something or someone lost:

My heart has been torn apart
Because of this parting...
O gazelle of all gazelles
You, who plan to go away!

Noteworthy in the song's lyrics are references to nature, gazelles, messenger birds and visions of illness induced by separation. These themes are common to others songs in the folkloric tradition¹⁷⁷ but are curious when presented in 21st Century London - and stylistically referential to Ottoman times in their singing in the Middle East. There are further clues to the relevance Reem ascribes to *Sprinting Gazelle* in her telling of the experience in the Lebanon camps. Those who reached the camps in the aftermath of the *Nakba* and *Naksa* did so on foot and, the elderly women report of walking barefoot from Palestine. Reem concludes that it is little wonder that the song is sung to mark the long journeys of loved ones. She doesn't directly reference her own journey at this point but it feels worthy of more than a cursory mention that she could not “return” to Palestine,¹⁷⁸ or even to Kuwait, if she wanted to. While in her childhood Palestine was been a meeting point with her heritage, a place of learning to be Palestinian, Reem also reports of physical illness coinciding with her numerous visits in adult life.¹⁷⁹

This anxiety of connection with a homeland lost (two if Kuwait is included) extends to a sense of urgency expressed in Reem's description *Sprinting Gazelle*'s musical arrangement. Reem tells writer Randa Safieh that she consciously changed the rhythmic arrangement from a slow

¹⁷⁷ The singer of *Zareef el-Tool*, for example, implores the traveller that he will miss the scent of the land and that his heart will remain restless without the homeland.

¹⁷⁸ For her part, Reem says she would refuse any settlement based on the acceptance of colonialism represented by the “Vichy government” of the Palestinian Authority.

¹⁷⁹ In the self-penned *Lima Uhibbuha* (“Why do I love her?”) Reem sings of the pains she associates with visiting Palestine.

malfouf to a quicker rhythmic pattern known regionally as *younani* (“Greek”). (Safieh 2006) For the “original” version recorded in 2005 for the album of the same name, Sprinting Gazelle is arranged differently, prominently featuring *yarghul*¹⁸⁰ played by Tigran Aleksanyan; notably it is the only track on the album to include *yarghul* and is sandwiched between songs featuring European instruments and the more obvious influence of jazz.¹⁸¹

Reem’s vocals toy with subtle dynamic changes over a verse that would be sparse if not for the track’s metronomic layering of Middle Eastern and Central Asian percussion instruments and handclaps. The *yargul* improvises in *maqam hijaz*, dropping to a drone for verses. This instrumental arrangement was never replicated onstage, yet Reem’s musicians would exploit space, tempo and improvisation in other ways. During a 2009 show in Istanbul, for example, Reem performed the song onstage as a guest of the folkloric band Kardeş Türküler, backed up by a veritable orchestra of percussionists, vocalists, string and wind players and dancers. While Reem is able to exploit the space offered by having backing singers, interjecting *zaghroot* (“ululations”) and ad libbing, the thickness of texture adds to a feeling of intensity, despite the smoothness of the performers.

Reem’s second recorded release of Sprinting Gazelle was from the 2012 Tabernacle gig. *Oud* player Tamer Abu-Ghazaleh opens with a *taqasim* introduction to the ostinato melody, manipulating string buzz and employing muting technique rarely heard on the instrument. During the breakdown section, underpinned by piano and drums, Tamer and Cornish bassist Ryan Trebilcock are featured soloists, being encouraged to “challenge” each other by Reem, setting the audience up as boxing spectators. The chronology of arrangements feature a buildup in a somewhat literal sense: a 2005 tempo of 96 bpm has risen to 104 for the 2009 and 2012 concerts, and was fractionally faster still at the July 2014 concert in London.

If Reem sees Sprinting Gazelle as representing *sumud*, its musical content is perhaps revealing of what this connotes. In the previous chapter I presented the term’s varied use towards narratives of rootedness and *za’atar w zeit* oral tradition, or encompassing resistance with the music of the Rahbani brothers, discussing active and passive concepts and analyses. I referred to Reem’s Kuwaiti experience as a musical politics of Palestinian belonging; in this chapter

¹⁸⁰ A long double-reed instrument used in older recordings of Palestinian wedding music. (Al-Birreh 1997)

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Zoe Rahman's piano introduction to *Yafa*.

the leading role played by working class Palestinians towards bringing *fellahi*-inspired performance to other sections of the community during the *Intifada* underlines the grassroots processes of this phenomena. At crucial moments, *sumud* is not passive waiting, but instead forces itself to be heard. This is a theme of much Palestinian literature of the post-1948 period, from Fawaz Turki's narrative evolution of refugeeism into a political identity from the late-1960s (Turki 1972; Lindholm-Schulz 1999), to the active process of national awakening in Galilee after Land Day in 1976. (Massalha 2016; Kanaaneh 2008)

The changing and, in my reading, escalating arrangements of Sprinting Gazelle reviewed above reflect something of the active process engendered by *sumud* and point to a new role played by wedding songs onstage. They also reflect Reem's protagonistic approach and feelings of separation from Palestine as a Britain-based exile. The next chapter will look more closely at this nationalist-cosmopolitan approach to musical tradition, along with Reem's responses to political and industry hostilities in Britain. But I want to return briefly to the concepts of transmission discussed in relation to wedding songs earlier in the chapter and to Reem's mother's singing in the previous chapter.

The sung history of Sprinting Gazelle reportedly originates in Galilee, brought to Lebanon by women such as those from the village of Sha'b encountered by Reem in 1999. (Safieh 2006) I have already discussed questions of commemoration with regards to Kuwait but it feels worth restating at this point Khalili's point regarding the transmission of memory being the core content of commemorative practices. (2007, 6) For the women in the camp, the songs were an opportunity to discuss their past and the centrality of historic Palestine to their stories. Transmission is therefore woven casually into national consciousness. It could be added that while the women said that weddings were the arena of public performance for this material, Reem has placed the song in a new context, geographically, sonically and in its form of oral transmission. Young women sing along to Sprinting Gazelle at her concerts in London, yet the vehicle of the wedding is replaced by the stage; the extemporising qualities in the music become formalised within a certain instrumental and structural platform.

Discussing nostalgic references in Palestinian poetry after 1948, Parmenter argues that:

“This mentally reconstructed Palestine is an aesthetic creation incorporating memories and ideals that can survive unperturbed in the individual's psyche. But it does not reflect

contemporary experience and therefore tells us little of the Palestine that has been transformed by the state of Israel.” (1994, 70)

While her point is not without relevance, the role of *sumud* in the life of refugees and exiles is somewhat missing from this analysis - and curiously so, considering the centrality of the refugees in the works of Palestinian poets. Furthermore, as observed in regards to Kuwait and the other locations covered in this thesis, the spaces inhabited outside Palestine have served as important arenas for defining the practices of national culture, remembrance and resistance, shaping transmission to new generations. Interestingly, Turino seeks to untie indigenous cultural practices from specific locations or rural regions, arguing that discourse on globalism “downplays alternative indigenous spaces” for performance. (2000, 19) The wedding music presented by Reem Kelani may, therefore, have certain regional origins, but remains relevant to groups inhabiting locations far from historic Palestine.

So where does Reem herself figure in this tradition of oral transmission? In the introduction to this thesis I argued that she is herself a skilled oral historian, much like the “big mamas” of Palestine, so central to her song-stories. This telling is itself part of the performance - the women in the camps brought spoken recollections to contextualise and place their songs in an area of social life, weddings, and surrounded their tales with reminiscence about the land, scorning political figures and expressing hope for return. Many of these features in the oral tradition are present in the Reem Kelani music project. Her concerts are full of anecdotes, dispatch material and stories of who taught her the songs. I have referred to a possible conclusion on Reem's place in this generational transmission: with her staging of songs like *Sprinting Gazelle*, they are no longer strictly wedding songs, but then neither were they when they were sung in the refugee camp homes of Palestinian women in Lebanon. The transmission is therefore not formalised exactly but, borrowing Turino's suggestion in another context, untied from their specific location and context; weddings are themselves arenas of performance, yet the transmission of the material in the Palestinian folk tradition has remained informal, or as I asserted with Yusra's kitchen singing, casual. The function and arrangement of this wedding material is important and, at least in the example I have analysed in this section, evolves with Reem Kelani and her band, musically, politically and referentially to the anxieties and stresses of being a musician transmitting the Palestinian narrative in a frequently hostile place of exile. The concluding chapter of this case study will pick up on this theme and discuss Reem's experiences in Britain.

Chapter 5: “World Music” and a Palestinian voice

In previous chapters, I focused largely on the early years of Reem Kelani’s contact with music, during her upbringing in a cosmopolitan phase in Kuwait. I have shown that the political, social and musical responses of Palestinians to conditions of colonial exile took on certain forms, in ever-continuing connection with the homeland. The flashpoints of the Zionist-led war of 1967 and the Palestinian uprising twenty years later were particularly galvanising towards public expressions of national sentiment. In the home, Reem had accessed the oral musical traditions of her mother’s singing, which took on new connections and relevancies in Reem’s experience of Palestinian weddings and her own coming of age in an increasingly politicised environment. The final section of Chapter 4 discussed the influence of wedding music on Reem’s contemporary musicianship, towards concepts of oral transmission and *sumud*. I argued that Reem’s arrangements expressed the strains of exile and alluded to the idea that rurally-referential musics have relevance in Britain, beyond their original geography.

This concluding chapter of the case study assesses the new terrain for Reem Kelani’s mission to transmit a Palestinian narrative that asserts a continuity of pre-1948 musical expression, calls for the right of return of refugees, rejects normalising projects and is explicitly critical of a Palestinian leadership betraying these principles. The immediate context for our discussion will be the “world music” industry, both a source of vocal frustration for Reem’s attempts to find a creative outlet, and a site of necessary outreach. I engage seriously with the anxieties of persecution, reviewing literature and experience on British multiculturalism. Drawing on the works of Hutnyk, El-Ghadban, Burkhalter and others, I see the World Music sector as exclusive of politically challenging voices, deepening the discussion by asking to what extent Palestinians are a special case in the music scene, broadening these theoretical horizons in connection to concepts of “multiculturalism” in Britain. In this context, what does this music industry offer or fail to offer a Palestinian exile singer? And what does all this mean for the Palestinian case more generally? I begin this discussion with a broader examination of the musical forms taken on by Reem Kelani and her band.

5.1 2004-2012: an evolving sound

Chapter 4 presented Reem Kelani's music from the point of view of its relationship to an oral tradition in wedding music and discussed the evolution of the song *Sprinting Gazelle* in the band's repertoire. Delving further into the stylistic considerations of this work, it is worth considering firstly what is to be gained from an analysis of musical form. This has been a subject of discussion for a range of ethnomusicologists and scholars, with stylistic choices linked to (re)configuring national projects, mediating social interaction and conveying the contradictions at the heart of globalisation. (Stokes 2010; Buchanan 2007, 257-8; Armbrust 2000) In order to understand how musical aesthetics are tied to social formation, Kay Dickinson calls for "imaginatively proliferate feasible understandings" in academic study. (Burkhalter 2013, 29) In this section, I hope to get an idea on how Reem Kelani's jazz-inflected brand of Palestinian music might help to understand the processes underway for a politically committed migrant musician in a European context.

The "fight scene" during the 2012 Tabernacle performance of *Sprinting Gazelle* offered an example of the musical interaction engendered in a performance by the Reem Kelani and her band. I want to raise two more examples that exhibit the jazz tendencies in her arrangements and that stylistically encapsulate Reem's approach; the point of this analysis follows on from Dickinson's appeal and I will move on to discussing the social understandings engendered by the aesthetic qualities of the performances.

The first example is the arrangement of "*Twelve Plus One*"¹⁸² performed at Womad festival in Reading, 31 July 2004, featuring Sami Bishai on violin, Zoe Rahman on piano and Fariborz Kiani on *daf* (Iranian framedrum). Reem explains to the audience that the song was learned from women in 'Ain al-Hilweh and that it took her a while to understand the 13 beat cycle (3+3+4+3) that the women beat out in the kitchen: "I actually learned this rhythm rolling the couscous on a tray in a refugee camp in South Lebanon." The arrangement begins with *daf*, marking the meter with a sparsity of embellishment aside from the instrument's characteristic jingles and finger rolls. Bishai's violin exploits double stops and the open D string during an introductory *taqasim* in *maqam bayat*, before bringing in the repetitive melody around which

¹⁸² Later re-named *A Baker's Dozen* for its studio-recorded version on the *Sprinting Gazelle* album. (Kelani 2006)

the song is based. Reem's vocals are given creative license, with improvisatory phrases on the archetypal expression *amaan* ("woe").

The Womad audience is centrally involved in the performance as Reem tells the audibly eager crowd in her introduction: "It's what they call in Arab aesthetics 'the difficult easy' or 'the easy difficult'".¹⁸³ In a long mid-section, the piano and violin drop out to join in flamenco-like handclaps as Reem encourages the audience to sing the numbers of the beats to the *bayat* melody. Her call for the re-entry of the piano – "come on Zoe, don't be shy!" – doesn't noticeably take effect until later. This is worth thinking about - throughout the piece the piano is subdued, playing a simple percussive pattern around I - $\flat\text{II}\Delta$ and I - $\flat\text{VII}$ chord relationships; these are clearly outside the *maqam* framework of the piece but are not jarring. On the album version,¹⁸⁴ which features clarinet and bass alongside the other instruments, the piano is very low in the mix. Arguably in the Womad arrangement, the audience is more involved than the pianist. Their sung voices and female ululations could be heard on the BBC recording. Violin is more central and, of course, suited to microtonal *maqam* performance.

An interesting point about the performance of *Twelve Plus One/A Baker's Dozen* is that the Arabic title *Habl el-Ghiwa* ("The pull of seduction")¹⁸⁵ isn't mentioned in spoken concert introductions and is in parenthesis on the album. In her interaction with the audience, Reem focuses on getting across her experience of the song's transmission from Palestinian refugees and on its striking rhythm, encouraging participation in its non-literary aspects. Notably, there is a different level of interaction when Reem knows there are Palestinians and other Arabs in the audience. At London performances of the song Galilean Lullaby (*Tahlileh Jaliliyyeh*),¹⁸⁶ Reem encouraged Arabic speakers to join in the repeated final phrase,¹⁸⁷ instructing others to sing the same melody in "la la la"s, likening it to Sesame Street.

A second, contrasting example is a 2012 arrangement of The Porter's Anthem (*Shid el-Hizam* - "Tighten your belt"), composed in 1919 by Sayyid Darwish, with lyrics by Badie Khayri; it

¹⁸³ Information gathered from Reem Kelani's Womad 2014 performance. I accessed the recording on the BBC website but at the time of this study it was no longer online.

¹⁸⁴ The Sprinting Gazelle album is the subject of analysis by Randa Safieh, whose work I have attempted to complement rather than duplicate here. (Safieh 2006)

¹⁸⁵ In her Sprinting Gazelle album liner notes Reem explains that the lyrics are compiled from those gathered in the field and by Shaikh Rasheed Zaid Kelani (1905-1965). There are references to local dress, horses and Bedouin tents, evoking images of refugees and the tribulations of migration.

¹⁸⁶ Tabernacle 2012 and Rich Mix 2014.

¹⁸⁷ "ما شِدِّهْ عُمْرُهَا دَامَتْ عَلَى مَخْلُوقٍ" - "Hardship never lasts forever"

is featured on Reem's Live at the Tabernacle album. Part of an unfinished project presenting Reem's arrangements of Darwish material, the band at this particular show stands in contrast to the Womad group by a less restrained approach to jazz and improvisation. Placed at the end of first set before the intermission, *Shid el-Hizam* is high-energy, with Reem's theatrical reading of the vocal content, an anti-colonial satire on the bureaucracy of the British occupation. Bruno Heinen's piano stands out, beginning with sprawling, jolting arpeggios, unrelated directly to the *maqam* of the Darwish composition (*hijaz*), or if so by distant chord substitutions, eventually settling in rhythm with the *oud*; coincidentally, the chord relationships underpinning the metred part of this introduction are very similar to those used rather sparingly in Zoe Rahman's background accompaniment to *Habl el-Ghiwa*.

Since *Shid el-Hizam* is so well known, there are also comparisons to be drawn with other interpretations. Reem's arrangement eludes the lexicon of Arabic performances,¹⁸⁸ exemplified by punctuation in rhythm of verses with piano and drums picking up on the dotted rhythms marking the poetic rhymes. But it is also different from recent Arab jazz arrangements; in the hands of Lebanese singer Rima Khsheich, for example, *Shid el-Hizam* sounds smoother, more polite by comparison. Its placement in a set of Reem Kelani's nationally-referential Palestinian songs further emphasises the revolutionary politics of much Sayyid Darwish material.¹⁸⁹ Like some of the other material I have mentioned, the live Reem Kelani version features audience participation, singing the final repetitions in call and response: "*hela, hela!*" (lets go!) before the band finishes in rhythmic unison.

Shid el-Hizam is very different in its origins and conception to *Habl el-Ghiwa*, composed by known figures rather than being a product of oral tradition and an unknown composer. To some, Darwish was already avant garde, had broken with conservative approaches and leading a revolution in the cultural sphere. (Muhssin 2013) Being in *maqam hijaz*, the piece is more or less transferrable to instruments in equal temperament, explaining its wider use. Looked at in isolation, the song appears to mark a departure from the usual form of presentation for the band, at least compared to the earlier arrangement of *Habl el-Ghiwa*. Interestingly, changes in band personnel (not without their political and artistic implications, see below) have contributed to

¹⁸⁸ Examples of more traditionalist treatment include recent online recordings by Tarik Beshir and Oxford Maqam. (Youtube release, 29 September 2013)

¹⁸⁹ Resisting a tendency to see Darwish's position as opportunistic towards the rising anticolonial movement, Muhssin writes that "Darwish's songs address subjects that are part of the plight of everyday life of the Egyptian working class but also because the relationship between the singer and the listener is a new one, a more intimate one. The singer was of the people." (2013, 136)

the performance of different forms of arrangement, perhaps signified by a coming to the fore of jazz influences. The piano could be seen as a signifier of a less restrained approach, something of a departure from traditionalised instrumentalism. Yet the new band also prominently includes songs from the folk lineage - in arrangements like *Hawwillouna*, for example, Reem eschews thick texture and cosmopolitan themes in favour of stripped down vocals and percussion, a seemingly more faithful reproduction of the form of transmission, evoking if not reproducing the style of the Palestinian women in the refugee camps.

Reviewing the *Live at the Tabernacle* album, London-based promoter Sebastian Merrick mused on the overall sound:

“I wonder how Reem’s music plays in the Arab world and I recall Fairuz’s to me excellent jazz-influenced phase. I may be wrong but seems one doesn’t hear so much of this kind of musical blending from the Arab world these days.” (2016)

There is much that is unique in the music of Reem Kelani, bringing together a defiant Palestinian narrative and traditional melodies within a sophisticated brand of jazz and a range of other influences. However, Merrick is mistaken in not recognising the ongoing influence of jazz in the wider Arab world. I will thematise Reem’s position in relation to this movement in Arab music, returning to our question of what her choice of musical form says about her position as a Palestinian exile in Britain.

Writing on the recent work of Iraqi-American trumpeter and composer Amir Elsaaffar, Rastegar seeks to challenge the idea of competing extreme poles of tradition and modernity. (2013, 74) Elsaaffar performs in multiple styles and does in fact maintain a separation between his jazz experimentalism and a parallel career as a “solidly traditional” performer of Iraqi *maqam*. While Western jazz has often brought in non-Western elements “with little critical examination of the sociocultural implications of such appropriation”, says Rastegar, Elsaaffar’s “double fluency” poses challenges to these practices and assumptions, emerging “from the soil of the diasporic, the transnational, and the bicultural.” (2013, 77) Elsaaffar stands within a broader jazz tradition in Arabic music, a subject touched upon by other writers in the same volume.¹⁹⁰ Jazz ensembles were prominent in Egyptian popular and cabaret music from at least the 1930s, forming a central component of its film music scene for the decades that followed.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, Sami W. Asmar on Ziad Rahbani, another musician presenting a certain dualism of expertise. (2013, 156)

(Armbrust 1996; Slobin 2008) The jazz phase of Fairuz, referenced above by Merrick, was in fact part of a longstanding tradition in Beirut jazz,¹⁹¹ that today includes Rabih Abou Khalil, Rima Khsheich and other musicians. Palestinians incorporating jazz into their work in various ways include Saied Silbak (see Chapter 6), Ruba Shamshoum, Basel Zayed and Nai Bargouthi.

But where does Reem Kelani fit? Why does jazz feature so prominently in her work? And why indeed does the core talent of her ensemble consist of European jazz musicians and not virtuoso Arabs? Elsaffer's explanation for choosing jazz forms for *maqam* expansion stems from an urge to "break out" of both, while on the respecting the "very specific" traditions of Iraqi *maqam*. (Rastegar 2013, 83) Like Elsaffer, Reem references her background growing up in a family and location conducive to eclectic tastes. As shown in the chapter on Kuwait, her father Yusuf brought jazz and stage music into the home, while her mother Yusra is depicted as carrying Palestinian oral traditions in singing. Reem explains that she feels "at peace" in both genres: "I've never felt a clash, ever, between scatting and doing *layali*¹⁹²... between improvisation in Arabic or improvisation in jazz." Interestingly, both Reem Kelani and Amir Elsaffer maintain a separation *on some level*. While Elsaffer makes a complete separation between Iraqi *maqam* on the one hand and *maqam* exploration in jazz on the other, with Reem things aren't so clear cut; the arrangement of *Hawwillouna*, for example, appears stripped down compared to other songs that directly mix traditional melodies with jazz arrangements, yet drummer Antonio Fosco's use of cymbal accents carries the stamp of his jazz background.

Reem emphasises certain technical qualities in the musicianship of her ensemble, "smooth as a baby's bottom" in their execution of complex rhythms and ideas. The use of European jazz musicians is, she says, to some extent an expression of necessity and location: "I don't live in Ramallah or Cairo, so naturally, I don't have access to musicians that would qualify more as Arab musicians." Yet a certain evolution of musical presentation discussed above, with reference to concerts in 2004 and 2012, shows that the style of Reem's arrangements has clearly moved towards forms that highlight the role of the piano, particularly with the involvement of Bruno Heinen.¹⁹³ There are also other factors that she does not mention, and which are beyond

¹⁹¹ Burkhalter sees the Beirut jazz and rock bands performing in the Civil War-era as laying the groundwork for today's alternative music scene in Lebanon. (2013, 201)

¹⁹² Interview in London, 1 July 2016. *Layali* is a vocal-based section of music based around the words "*ya leili... ya 'aini!*" (lit. "oh my night, oh my eye!"), leading typically into a *mawwal* section of semi-improvised sung poetry.

¹⁹³ Reem Kelani and Bruno Heinen have performed voice and piano setlists on numerous occasions, for example at Cambridge Jazz Festival in November 2018.

her control, such as the departure of Egyptian violinist Sami Bishai, that impact her musical choices. Returning to an earlier theme, Reem's English communication with the audience – and tempered audience participation – also speak to a need to be understood, with language playing an important role in mediation. Bob White follows this line of discussion, analysing three figures of language: universality, hybridity and solidarity, mediating the relationship between “world music” artists and their potential fans. (2012, 190) I suggest that this is reflected musically as well as linguistically. The cosmopolitan sounds used in Reem's Tabernacle ensemble, her arrangements of Sayyid Darwish and other musical factors combine with often quite comprehensive spoken introductions, serving to offer the Palestinian narrative of exile and return in a language understood by a mixed, but usually English-speaking audience.

The musical products of Reem's position of exile and experience of colonial relations are mediated through her manipulation of style, genre and transmission. While Reem and other Palestinian musicians are far from alone in expressing culturally positions of unequal international relationships, (Armbrust 2000; Stokes 2000) for Reem, the jazz influences spring from a time-specific period for Palestinians in a far-from-postcolonial Kuwait, as well as to London and a British context marked by the commodification and depoliticisation of “world music”. Our next section looks at Reem's position within the music industry.

5.2 The “P word”: the anxieties of “world music” happy families

Reviewing my observations of her vocal interjections on the subject, I engage in this final section with the anxieties of persecution, reviewing literature on “world music” and, briefly, the experience of “multicultural” policies in Britain. Following a range of writers including Hutnyk (2000), El-Ghadban (2001) and Burkhalter (2013), I see the “world music” sector as profit-driven and hostile to politically challenging voices, deepening the discussion by asking to what extent Palestinian musicians are a special case in this field. Examining Reem Kelani's claim that industry rejection stems from her commitment to a defiant view of art and politics, I build my analysis through such questions as: What does “world music” offer or fail to offer an exile singer committed to transmitting a Palestinian narrative? And what does all this mean for public expressions of support for the Palestinian cause?

During a vocal workshop at a London church in 2004, Reem spoke candidly about her lack of opportunities in Britain.¹⁹⁴ She'd built a repertoire of performance material and a talented band, was gaining an audience, particularly in leftist circles, but had grown increasingly frustrated at what she saw as mainstream refusal to approach the "P word". To Reem, this meant no record deal, no promotion, few paid gigs, and little prospect of recording and releasing her debut album. This narrative of struggle would be a feature of her public statements in the years to come; humorous jibes at the music industry are part of Reem live show - "They don't think I'm ethnic enough!" ... "And now I'm going to dare to sing in English."¹⁹⁵ Shortly after, she gave a revealing interview to local press, highlighting some of the musical challenges she'd faced in the period of Israel's invasion and historic defeat in Lebanon, reflecting on performing as a Palestinian in present day Britain:

"The world music scene is very middle-class and often naively liberal, and it wants to address politics by forgetting about them, or by putting you on stage together with Israeli musicians to play happy families. And then I'm a woman on top of that, and then there's the Arab-Muslim element. Since 9/11 people talk about Muslim issues and identity but indigenous cultural heritages are swept under the carpet. Palestinian identity is ignored, and of course 20 per cent of Palestinians are Christian." (Reem Kelani in Irving 2007)

These themes were developed in subsequent interviews, in which Reem told the story of her childhood attendance of the wedding in Nein, laying claim to authenticity in the face of ongoing Zionist attempts to expropriate Palestinian culture. The "world music mafia", she went on, doesn't see her as authentic enough:

"In England, because they don't know enough about their culture musically, they're more into exoticising the culture of the other, rather than appreciating it. They're not interested in their own indigenous music, they're not interested in the indigenous music of the migrants in this country." (Reem Kelani in al-Shamahi 2014)

In our discussions, Reem traces her industry reception to her commitment to a narrative that sees the *Nakba* as central, criticises the Palestinian leadership and supports a boycott of Israeli

¹⁹⁴ European Social Forum, workshop and performance at St Michael's church, Camden Town, 15 October 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Concert at Matt and Phred's, Manchester, 15 October 2006.

musicians, asking rhetorically, “Do you think this is helping my career?”¹⁹⁶ She reveals that she is still without a record company, and has released her two albums through crowdfunding and activist donations. It is so far unreported that Reem does not make a living from music, and works as a literary translator to pay the rent. Reem offers two arguments: first, that as a Palestinian woman musician with a particular approach to music and politics, she is sidelined by “world music” institutions; second, that this industry is not interested *in general* in migrant music in Britain. The source of such policies, she argues, is a rejection of oppositional politics and a thirst for exoticism, to the detriment of authentic expressions of indigenous forms of culture.

What, then, does the “world music” industry offer or fail to offer a performer in Reem’s position? Is the predicament unique to Palestinians or, as suggested in the interview quoted above, also faced by migrant musicians more generally? Is Reem right about her narrative being the main barrier? Where do questions of authenticity come in? And, if a process of apparent no-platforming of politically committed Palestinian musicians as being connected to the treatment of radical black and migrant music, what is unique in this case? I see the stresses and strains of musicianship as rooted in political and economic phenomena. The anxieties voiced by Reem towards her experiences in Britain are, I argue, expressive of real barriers set up by a mainstream dedicated to selling whatever it views as productive of profit; as a “nation building project”, Palestinian nationalism does not fit this industry mould. (Stokes 2004) Moreover, the playing field for pro-Palestine actors is drifting further rightward as the ruling class maintains support for Israeli Zionist colonialism.¹⁹⁷ I argue that these questions have musical expression and that in an industry where the bottom line is the determining factor, the form of cosmopolitan, avant-garde presentation which harnesses Reem Kelani’s Palestinian narrative is seen as threatening to a xenophobic ruling ideology. I will place this argument within the context of a declining official ideology of “multiculturalism” which was, in any case, anything but. Finally, I question whether these concrete conditions of migrancy in Europe affect the themes, convictions and spaces utilised in Palestinian music in Britain.

¹⁹⁶ Interview in London, 27 July 2016.

¹⁹⁷ While at present the Conservative government retains a strong alliance with the Israeli state, the rightward drift I describe is also embodied in the opposition Labour Party’s adoption of an IHRC definition of antisemitism which deligitimises seeing Israel as a racist endeavour. The latter has resulted in council-led attempts to ban meetings of pro-Palestine groups, with others attended by Prevent ‘anti-extremism’ officers sent to monitor activist groups. (Gulliver 2019)

When celebrities offer vocal defence of the “world music” business, Feld writes that they often point to hybrid musics in pop, with positive emphasis on fluid identities, with hybridity held up as a form of resistance. Meanwhile the “hegemonic managerial and capital relations in the music industry” are ignored. (2000) The process, in fact, promotes only certain forms of diversity, “banalises difference” (Guilbault 1993, 40) and tears musics from their contexts, lumping them together in a single “genre”. (Chanan 1995). Or put another way by Kay Dickinson, “Progress also becomes another name for increased commodification, igniting the allure of novelty to diversify the market.” (2013, 18) Continuing this discussion, it is noteworthy that many musicians coming into the “world music” scene are already multi-lingual in a musical sense - or possess a “double fluency”, to again borrow Rastegar’s phrase.

In the case of Reem Kelani, a cosmopolitan upbringing in unique circumstances in Kuwait helped to shape and define her tastes and, ultimately, a vision of what Palestinian music can encompass. But also central to her musical narrative is the idea that the British mainstream is an inhospitable, hostile environment for politically-committed musicians in her position. In our interviews and discussions, she developed the theme of marginalisation by pointing to her struggles in precarious work and renting in London; the professional musicians joining her band are paid out of her own pocket; recording projects are few and far between, requiring extensive crowd-funding; and what sporadic work she gets from Womad, the BBC and other smaller festivals and institutions barely contributes to her day-to-day survival.

Hutnyk discusses the navigation of a profit-driven British music scene by South Asian youth musicians, faced with censorship and platform denial¹⁹⁸ when they threaten the status quo. (2000, 56) In the wider context of “international politics, market forces and imperial relations”, festivals like Womad become promoters of a curious form of artistic presentation, simultaneously relying on traditional sounds alongside the billing of performers who consciously reject a national or singular heritage. To Hutnyk, diverse audiences in advanced capitalist countries are complicit in the playing out of capitalist cultural production, characterised by the “evacuation of politics.”¹⁹⁹ However, the success or otherwise of

¹⁹⁸ A comparable form of cultural censure may be found in the blackballing of US athletes committed to supporting the Black Lives Matter and anti-Trump movements, most notably Colin Kaepernick, who is at the time of writing without an American football team. (Moore 2017)

¹⁹⁹ Hutnyk’s analysis is, in my view, over-focused on audience. His comment on international relations quoted above is, in fact, point five in a seven-point list that also includes “free-fetish lifestyle hippie-dom”. While discomfort at white “waifs” or cultural (mis)appropriation by “world music” audiences may irritate Hutnyk, I

commodity production is by nature unpredictable. Writing on Roma musicians, Silverman explains:

“Festivals are instructive in investigating the motivations and choices of images and musical styles that are involved in the cultural brokering of Romani music for Western audiences. Economics informs many choices; however, there are varied interpretations as to what sells. Whereas some promoters do not want politics to spoil the entertainment, others believe audiences need to know about persecution and that historical and political information augments the multicultural agenda of world music festivals.” (2007, 357)

I extend this definition to put Reem’s Womad performance into perspective; in 2004, a time when mass anti-war demonstrations and Palestinian flags were fresh in the mind and perhaps something that the “world music” scene wanted to plug into. An era of British politics characterised under Labour governments by wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and, at home, on “benefit cheats” and “economic migrants,” would turn rightward still in the years of Brexit and Trump. More recently, universities have banned pro-Palestine events while government ministers label anti-Israel campaigners as anti-Semitic;²⁰⁰ where Arab (let alone Palestinian) musicians are invited to perform, they must often do so alongside Israeli musicians.²⁰¹ The environment which saw Reem perform at Womad is, I argue, already markedly less welcoming, a theme to which I will return; although it is important to note that for the 2004 performance Reem was not invited to the main stage but to the BBC tent, where performers received a flat rate royalty of £88, less than the price of a weekend camping ticket.²⁰²

suggest that he conflates surface phenomena with the underlying material phenomena that he elsewhere more critiques incisively as the “bastardisation of chaos” for profit.

²⁰⁰ Successive Israeli military campaigns are accompanied by heightened rhetoric from government figures denouncing pro-Palestinian voices as anti-Semitic. (Jerusalem Quarterly 2002) Massad turns this stereotype on its head, discussing the extent to which early Zionist material drew on anti-Semitic rhetoric and exposing the belief of modern Zionists that they control US policy: “What these anti-Semitic notions miss, however, is that the “Jewish lobby” plays the same role that the China lobby played in the 1950s and the Cuba lobby still plays to this day. The fact that it is more powerful than any other lobby on Capitol Hill testifies to the importance of Israel in US strategy and not to some alleged Jewish “power” independent of and extraneous to the US “national interest.”” (2006, 150) Neve Gordon calls for an end to the equation between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, pointing out the political motives of the campaign: “The ‘new anti-Semitism’, we are told, takes the form of criticism of Zionism and of the actions and policies of Israel, and is often manifested in campaigns holding the Israeli government accountable to international law, a recent instance being the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.” (2018)

²⁰¹ In January 2017 Syrian *qanoun* player Maya Youssef pulled out of the small Ahbab Festival in Cambridge after pressure from BDS activists highlighting the organisers’ agenda of promoting Israeli musicians.

²⁰² Low pay in many ways characterises the industry for performers who are not “A list”. Taylor lists adverts published by UK and US production companies looking for global sounds, one offering artists a chance to pay \$5 to submit an “authentic sounding world music” song for use on film or TV. (2012, 175)

The works of Hutnyk, Guilbault and Dickinson quoted above suggest that the kind of diversity promoted by the “world music” business is at best limited, capitalistic and exclusive of narratives of political opposition. I argue that this is demonstrated quite acutely in the case of performers dedicated to a narrative of Palestinian liberation and anti-Zionism but that these oppositional narratives and their reception have much in common with the examples of black music in Britain offered by Gilroy,²⁰³ by Aki Nawaz (Swedenburg 2009; Hutnyk 2000), and to the stinging social criticism and “world music” rejectionism of Fela Kuti. (Veal 2000)²⁰⁴ Reem Kelani's views on official intolerance of the “P word” therefore converge with a virtual tradition of opposition to and anxiety towards the repressive and banalising tendencies of the “world music” field. As suggested in Hutnyk's chapter on Dog Tribe, the music video by Fun'Da'Mental, blacklisted from TV, this process is often tied to real world struggles and campaigns, in this case linked to the Criminal Justice Act and repressive measures targeting working class youth. (2000, 52)

In the Palestinian case it is important but perhaps obvious to state that the political and ideological mainstream beyond the “world music” business is opposed to the Palestinian narrative that Reem wields, as evidenced in the pro-Israel policies of British governments and corporations. Often denied spaces, grassroots activists in the pro-Palestine/BDS movement increasingly have to fight to be heard. (Williams 2017) An added complication is the expectation that Palestinian musicians will do nothing to oppose the involvement of Israeli musicians in festivals and projects not unrelated to the experiences of musicians like Saied Silbak (see Chapter 6).

If there is indeed mainstream hostility to expressions of Palestinian resistance, what role does music play? Do musical choices deny Reem Kelani Womad invitations or are festival organisers playing politics with politics? As discussed earlier in the chapter, the Palestinian narrative is clearly central to Reem's performance project, travelling through and beyond music into its description, narration and transmission. The band, or at least its leader, does not simply play music, but offers an inconvenient reminder that the generations of refugees in Lebanon,

²⁰³ Connected to musical trends, a particular focus for Gilroy in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* is the institutionalisation of municipal anti-racism and blunting of black and Asian radicalism by prominent sections of the British left during the 1970s and 1980s. (2002, 147)

²⁰⁴ Culshaw points out that Fela refused to be incorporated into the work of Paul McCartney and argued that the “white man is coming to steal our music.” “The “world music” category he often shoved into”, argues Culshaw, “is usually a useless one (musicians who happen not to be born in the US or Europe, that is, most of them) and tends to water down out [sic] and make acceptable radicals like Fela.” (2017)

for example, continue to cling to hopes of return. There is the further inconvenience of commitment to boycotting Israel and to a rejectionist approach to a Palestinian national leadership which European elites support.²⁰⁵ But musically speaking, Reem's performances also reference a narrative of refuge and displacement, expressed in arrangements of pre-1948 material.²⁰⁶ The previous section in this chapter looked at Reem's evolving presentation to more open play with jazz in her recent bands. There is a "fusion", a "hybridity" at play, even if such terms are viewed as problematic. (White 2012; Feld 2000; Hutnyk 2000)

Yet the musical adaptability and cosmopolitanism of the jazz musicians Reem brings together and trains, carries a certain attraction from "world music" projects which run counter to the narrative to which Reem is committed. Two key band members left her group in 2009 to perform with pro-Israeli world fusion vocalist Natacha Atlas,²⁰⁷ suggesting that Reem's comments on music industry wanting her to play "happy families" may have further connotations. Their leaving for a higher wage poses the question of what makes Atlas' music so commercially successful. In the first place, why does she have a record deal and Reem still doesn't? And what makes Atlas acceptable musically and politically to the "world music" scene? This is not the place to answer all of these questions but some have seen in Atlas' music a universality and, at least before her statements on Israel, signs of progressive politics. (Swedenburg 2001) Yet her work with Israeli musicians such as Yasmin Levy expresses a willingness to go to places where a musician committed to Reem Kelani's Palestinian narrative will not. Suggesting that musical nonconformity is "rare" in the Middle East, Jamie Renton hails the Atlas-Levy collaboration as the "sounds of unity". (2008) The implication that this project was in some way rebellious taps into a leitmotif of the "world music" myth, where from the 1990s global fusion came to be marketed as an alternative to the mainstream. (Taylor 2007, 167) To reverse Guibault's formula, the banal is presented as different and edgy as the business pursues commercial triumph. (1993, 40)

²⁰⁵ British funding to the Palestinian Authority is designed to "maintain stability" and pursue UK goals of a "two-state solution", according to government statements. Changes in December 2016 mean that only those individuals and agencies on a "vetted list" will receive such financial support. (UK Government statement, 16 December 2016)

²⁰⁶ At the time of writing, Reem Kelani and her band are working more specifically on arrangements of songs learned in Kuwait towards new recordings in 2018.

²⁰⁷ Atlas' pro-Israel views are put forward in interviews with Renton in *The National* (2008) and Bizawe in *Ha'aretz* (2014), in which she cites her family's settlement in the state of Israel and defends her collaborations with Israeli artists. In the latter interview Atlas renounces her earlier statements which opposed apartheid and called for a boycott of Israel. She performed at Ashdod in May 2014.

In *A Sweet Lullaby for World Music*, Feld points to a certain anxiety at the heart of “world music” production:

“Witnessing and chronicling these stories has produced a new discourse on authenticity, a discourse forged out of narratives equally anxious and celebratory about the world - and the music - of world music. Anxious narratives sometimes start from the suspicion that capitalist concentration and competition in the recording industry is always productive of a lesser artistry, a more commercial, diluted, and sellable version of a world once more “pure,” “real,” or less commodified. This suspicion fuels a kind of policing of the locations of musical authenticity and traditions. It questions whether world music does more to incite or erase musical diversity, asking why and how musical loss is countered by the proliferation of new musics.” (Feld 2000)

Concepts of purity and realness are not explicit in Reem Kelani's narrative on “world music” but there is much in Feld's analysis that speaks to the process I have described in this and previous chapters. Questions of authenticity are particularly worn in academic writing on global(ised) sounds and won't be reprised in detail here, (Karkabi 2018; Burkhalter 2013; Buchanan 2007; Armbrust 2000) with related considerations for Palestinian musicians towards artistic choice and national sentiment. (Kanaaneh 2013; McDonald 2013; Massad 2003) As seen from our discussion of the evolution of her band, Reem presents a concept of Palestinian music where traditionalism and cosmopolitanism are positioned as authentic components of an exile musicianship.²⁰⁸ For her, the sounds of her upbringing are inseparable from the *za'atar w zeit* stories of oral transmission. Following Feld's description, I suggest that Reem's anxieties towards the “world music” scene are as much about these musical principles as the Palestinian narrative to which she gives voice. Furthermore, these anxieties are rooted in a lived experience of struggle, where others are seen to “make it” at her expense.

I liken this experience in “world music” to the polarisation of Palestinian artists described by El-Ghadban and Strohm, between “collaboration and dialogue with Israelis and Jewish counterparts” on one hand, and on the other, “a trend supported by international activist groups [which] frames Palestinian art and music as part of a globalized resistance movement”, often supporting a boycott of Israel. (2013, 191) While El-Ghadban and Strohm seek to see “beyond” discourses on resistance and collaboration, I see in Reem Kelani's music career stark

²⁰⁸ The re-invention and reappropriation of regional forms of music is often presented as a measure of authenticity or as continuing an epic tradition, such as Fairuz and the Rahbani Brothers' versions of *muwashshah* and *qasida* (see Chapter 3).

expressions of the relationship of music to social formations in which a musician gravitates towards leftist and radical spaces in the absence of mainstream inclusion. To conclude this chapter, I place the struggle for space within a British context of rising austerity and governmental shelving of supposedly “multicultural” policies. While the issue of Palestine, and the fortunes of its vocal proponents, faces an uphill battle with the industry, at the same time political and economic conditions pave the way for grassroots expressions of resistance and *sumud*.

5.3 Conclusions: multiculturalism and alternative spaces for performance

Discussing “world music” trends in relation to globalisation, Stokes comments that:

“Multiculturalism may often have reduced rich musical traditions to mute tokens of otherness, to be noticed administratively or exploited commercially, but not engaged in meaningful, or lasting, dialogue.” (2003, 114)

As a policy of national and local government from the mid-1990s, “multiculturalism” spawned community projects, festivals and a variety of social events to promote “common values”, yet often excluding marginalised sections of migrant communities. (Hodgson 2014) A web of funding, administration and other contradictions was, Susan Davidson argues, designed to cover up “the real racism of the British state, by offering crumbs of capitalist prosperity to a layer of the ethnic minority communities”, “curbing militant resistance to racism” and was itself curbed as a policy, giving way to a renewed ruling class focus on “Britishness”. (Davidson 2004) If “multiculturalism” was productive of a certain space for cultural expressions of migrants, however tokenistic, it was by definition exclusive of radical politics. The years since its consignment to the dustbin of government buzz-words are characterised by the further closure of expressive opportunity, austerity policies cutting funding for music and education, and an adjacent rise in immigration controls. (see Chapter 8 on Raghda)

Such policies coincide with official hostility to the Palestinian narrative. But, in concluding this chapter, it must be recognised that Reem Kelani *does* find a platform - whether or not she is afforded a living from it. The search for alternative spaces – and the niche market of grassroots activists, Palestinian migrants and sections of the “world music” crowd – has led

her to perform at such spaces as the Anti-Capitalist Road Show (2012-13), fundraisers during the Israeli siege of Gaza (2014), events commemorating Palestinian icons like Naji al-Ali (2017) and Bradford Women of the World festival (2017). To such audiences, the music presented by Reem is something of a two-way conversation. As I argued in regards to her use of jazz and her English explanations, Reem seeks to converse in a language the audience understands, but at the same time expresses her multifaceted expertise. In another context, writes Gilroy:

“the hybridity which is formally intrinsic to hip-hop has not been able to prevent that style from being used as an especially potent sign and symbol of racial authenticity.” (2010, 107)

Dickinson points out that cultural fertilisations are never one-way, asking how “avant-garde” expressions of Arab art are localised and relocalised. (2013) In the context of this discussion, a return to Rastegar's analysis of a “double fluency” in the work of Amir Elsaffar appears strikingly asesthetic, almost technical in its focus. I suggest it is worth pursuing this concept towards artists' engagement and reception in the world of “world music”. Are there musico-political dualisms that allow, for example, Palestinian artists to both succeed in the industry and to simultaneously uphold openly political demands? Do musical choices transcend questions of collaboration or resistance? Or are the opposites the case? In this chapter I have attempted to show the connections between these questions and the material phenomena and politico-economic concerns of an industry based on an underlying profit motive.

At important historical junctures in her career – and in the recent history of the Palestinian struggle – Reem has had to reach out to her grassroots. Her two albums are both the result of hard-won donations and the goodwill of non-industry actors. But certain events point beyond her individual experience and speak to the wider fate of Palestinians in exile. In the summer of 2014, before performing at a London fundraiser during the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, Reem said she felt physically unready to sing. Yet she took to the stage before a partly Palestinian crowd, emotions running high, and received an ecstatic reception, with some taking to the stage to dance *dabke* during the encore. This evokes her childhood experiences, singing to exiles in 1967, suggesting the continuation of music as a centre of Palestinian social activity and in coping with war and tragedy, responding with defiance. In the concrete conditions of migrancy in Britain, Reem Kelani offers an insight into how the themes and convictions of Palestinian music are given voice.

Part II

Saied Silbak: land, instrumentalism and the *dakhil*

Chapter 6: “An even tougher act of resistance”

“One of them is called Maqtooa‘a, which means piece, musical piece, but it also means ‘cut’ – the feminine version of something that has been cut from. And what I was trying to implement, because most of the names I give to the pieces, I was trying to implement that Palestine is at the moment being cut from all the other Arabic world.”

“Another piece is called Bifrijha ‘Rabbak, which means ‘God will solve it!’ We say that a lot as Palestinians, to each other more than to anyone else. Stop saying ‘bifrijha ‘rabbak!’ Stop saying ‘god will solve it!’ And the way I mention the names of the pieces onstage is very sarcastic and it gets to people. I remember telling people ‘yeah we like to say bifrijha ‘rabbak, we put everything on rabbak [“your god”] and rabbak will solve everything’, and then there was a priest in one of the performances and he was like ‘Saied! What are you saying?!’ I was like ‘ah, abuna... [“our father”]. You know what I’m saying!’ And they started laughing, so it gets to people. And with time they get to know you and your beliefs and stuff. Another piece was called W Ba‘dein?! (“and then what?”) So it’s that kind of logic that I have. Does that make sense?”²⁰⁹

The second case study in this trilogy focuses on *oud* player Saied Silbak, born and raised in the Palestinian city of Shafa‘amr, in his late 20s at the time of writing, and studying music in London. In discussing Saied’s musical experiences as he grew up with Israeli citizenship, I analyse the internal and communal struggles of a Palestinian coming to terms with, and ultimately rejecting, the routes of “normalisation” and collaboration with a Zionist cultural monopoly. An early childhood marked by olive picking, Fairuz and “background” references to Palestine is suggestive of deeper processes in light of teenage involvement in a “reconciliation” project for talented musicians. It was through this project that Saied began to question things, looking to other Palestinian musicians, to literature, and to his grandfather’s recollections of the *Nakba*. I argue that his conclusions are part of a broader social movement among young ’48 Palestinians, responding to a second class citizenship in the political and economic spheres. In the context of a supremacist ruling ideology on the one hand, and NGO music projects that fail to address this inequality on the other, I put forward the view that a

²⁰⁹ Interview with Saied Silbak, London, 29 May 2016.

chronic lack of space for the transmission of oppositional narratives pushes many Palestinians to build avenues outside of the Israeli-dominated system.

6.1 The settlement music project

As a teenager, Saied was selected to take part in a cross-community music project at a neighbouring Israeli settlement, Rabin.²¹⁰ Rewarded as a promising *oud* player, he grasped the opportunity with both hands, excited by having received recognition for his hard work studying performance at a small music school in his area, and now had the chance to play with highly-trained musicians, expanding his horizons from Arab traditional and classical forms to jazz and experimental crossovers. Despite this initial enjoyment, Saied began to question the motives of the Israeli bodies running the project and, ultimately, the very conditions that meant high European standards of development for the settlement, while the streets of Shafa'amr crumbled through lack of investment.

“At some point when I was 15, 16, there started a programme in Rabin for coexistence. They [the Israeli side] started a project for young Arab and Israeli artists – theatre, performance, drawing... you know, the cool stuff. They had these interviews and I was successful in one of them and there was a guy there who was really sweet and we are friends now, a Jewish guy... he's very pro-Palestinian I think. He was the director of music in that project, which went on for six months and then stopped. And what stayed is my relationship with him, he's a pianist and composer and singer. He decided to create a little ensemble of me, him and a percussionist. You know, I was excited, someone wanted me to perform music, and to get money from it. And that was a bit of time before I started understanding the conflict, Israel, Palestine, what's happening.”

“So I went and played in that... and it wasn't political in any way. Maybe it had a statement that we can live together, you know, coexistence kind of style, which I don't believe in today. I believe it on the level of humans and people but I don't believe it on the political and governmental level. I believe it's possible in a fair way but not *their* way, not the Israeli way. So I played in that ensemble for about three or four years, and I remember that the last two years were when I met other Palestinian musicians and started understanding the true image

²¹⁰ The name of the settlement has been changed here at Saied's request.

and the way things truly are. And I remember the conflict within myself, like, ‘what am I doing?’ And that built up gradually until I withdrew completely from that ensemble.”

While Palestinians in Kuwait could, for a period, find space to perform independently, for Saied and those living in the *dakhil*, the musical openings that existed had other complexities and, in some instances, involved life-defining choices. Through the Rabin project, a young Saied developed musical and personal relationships with Israeli participants and project leaders. Some of these would continue for a number of years outside of their association at Rabin as they developed performance collaborations outside of the project. But eventually, becoming increasingly involved with other politicised Palestinian musicians, Saied began to see the project as reflecting the pressures of Israeli society for Palestinians to conform and give up any dreams of promoting their own artistic heritage in the face of a history of ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure, themes to which I will return below.

In retrospect, Saied sees ulterior motives in the Rabin music project’s claims to be an equal meeting of Jewish and Arab neighbours, promoting social peace and intercultural dialogue through musical performance. Palestinians in Shafa’amr and across Galilee had in previous generations been asked to cooperate with cultural “minority” celebrations in honour of the Israeli state’s anniversary. (Robinson 2013, 180) Saied’s more recent experience points to a broader and arguably subtler process across the occupied territories during the post-Oslo period, witnessing the rise to prominence of “coexistence” projects which have, on the surface, offered a more nuanced, less nakedly political form of cultural venture. Beckles Willson analyses the power relations engendered by projects using the medium of European classical music to produce ostensibly equal exchanges. Following Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality (1981), such projects as al-Kamandjati and the East West Diwan orchestra represent, in her view, simulations:

“utopian performances... ‘sold’ as representations of a better reality, but tend merely to evoke elements of reality that are decontextualised and are incorporated into reproducible (and marketable) models.” (2013, 260)

In reality, such projects exclude Palestinians, both as performers and audience members, while opening their doors to Israeli musicians who can more easily attend, and to the idea that street resistance can or should be pacified through diversion into (European) cultural avenues. Such

simulacra, according to Beckles Willson, are incompatible with the lived experiences of Palestinians in the West Bank.²¹¹ For Heather Bursheh, “Putting [on] a concert under the heading ‘Concert for Peace’, for example, is impossible. How can there be ‘peace’ inside an occupation?” (Beckles Willson 2013, 270) The power relations of collaboration have serious repercussions in this environment.²¹²

An opposing view is put forward by Brinner in *Playing Across a Divide* (2009), using the language of coexistence yet dismissing out of hand any attempt at Palestinian independence from the Israeli musical mainstream. While recognising an “existential dilemma” faced by Palestinian musicians, Brinner consciously rejects focus on those who have chosen either “flight” or “resistance”, mentioning Simon Shaheen and Bassam Bishara's decisions to emigrate, and Amal Murkus and Khaled Jubran's decisions to remain while taking “explicitly critical stances towards Israel.” (Brinner 2009, 309) Brinner sees Beckles Willson's narrative, placed alongside research on the cultural interventions of European colonial missions in Palestine, as reductive, “too neat” a fit, and rejects any implication that coexistence projects today have anything to do with colonialism. (2014) Yet the type of “Palestinian-Israeli” musicians favoured by Brinner are those who conform with the Zionist mainstream or enter into partnerships with Israeli performers. Pushing for “a third way”, meaning “accommodation” from the Palestinian side (Brinner 2009, 309) would mean acceptance of an unequal position. The project at Rabin therefore encapsulates a broader and increasingly contested trend.

During the process of workshops, small group performances and exchanges, the project leader²¹³ had seen something in Saied's musicianship that he wanted to make use of in his own work. At the time there was an assumption on Saied's part that the project leaders represented a kind of Israeli liberalism that he could work with, one that could even have extended to being “pro-Palestinian”. However, with time Saied deduced that he was consciously or unconsciously being used. In retrospect, Saied sees that he was one of a number of creative young Palestinian

²¹¹ Concerns on Western funded projects were aired by musician Basel Zayed, who questioned the need for multiple conservatoires and music festivals in the West Bank. Zayed contrasting this situation with Amman, where Jordan's national music school struggles for funding. (Interview in Ramallah, August 2013)

²¹² The global music system and cross-cultural music exchanges, says Stokes, reflect “profoundly asymmetrical north-south relationship[s]”. (2004; see also Hutnyk 2000; Dickinson 2013)

²¹³ Saied decided against giving the names of people involved.

pulled in by the opportunity to take part in the “cool stuff” at the Rabin settlement.²¹⁴ A focus on music and art made the project attractive to students of highschool age, regardless of any covert motive on the part of its Israeli organisers. Like other coexistence projects, it involved Israelis and a small group of Palestinians, this time with Israeli citizenship. The participants were chosen for their perceived artistic level and were screened, interviewed and auditioned. In this way the organisers could utilise the most talented Palestinians for their project. While it wasn’t overtly political, Saied says, the project represented “*their* way, the Israeli way” of promoting cultural coexistence and with it the possibility of living peacefully together. The project was organised and run from Rabin, a world apart from the disinvestment experienced by the Palestinians in their hometowns. Only those successful in the interview and audition phase got to sample this cultural opportunity and, obliquely, one aspect of the level of privilege accessed by Israeli residents of Rabin on a daily basis. It was a kind of “coexistence,” therefore, that didn’t address the inequality, but rather cherrypicked a few youngsters to temporarily benefit.

The young Palestinian musicians were initially attracted by the music on offer, wrapped up in a “coexistence style” and led by an Israeli musician. Saied does not focus on the experimental, cross-genre music arrangements of the Rabin project and the band he got involved in with the musician, looking instead to his socio-political realisation of what was happening. Later in the case study, I will look at Saied’s compositional work, where the piano features prominently alongside his *oud* playing. But rather than seeing cosmopolitan approach as a paradox or as a reactive contradiction of internal otherness, I argue that progressive, expansive approaches to music are characteristic of Palestinian experience. As Shohat writes,

“The defacto acceptance of hybridity as a product of colonial conquest and post-independence dislocations as well as the recognition of the impossibility of going back to an authentic past do not mean that the politico-cultural movements of various racial-ethnic communities should stop researching and recycling their pre-colonial languages and cultures.” (1992, 110-111)

Drawing on Schmitt, Manal Massalha describes the social reality inhabited by ’48 Palestinians as a colonial *nomos*, with the birth of Israel marking a “rupture in the existing socio-spatial and

²¹⁴ The term “settlement”, or *mustawtana* in Arab has itself been subject to challenge from Palestinians in the *dakhil*, with some using the more radical word *musta’amara*, (colony) in times of protest. (Robinson 2013, 181)

political order” after 1948. (2014, 165) This rupture marked the material consolidation of control in hands of the Zionist regime, setting down the social boundaries of its citizens:

“By defining itself a Jewish state and a state for the Jews, Israel set the boundaries of membership to be exclusively in the Jewish people, thus structurally hierarchising and racialising both space and citizenship.”

Both access to and participation in socio-cultural events are expressive of this overarching framework, where space is determined by the material constraints of a colonial Zionist regime, whose ruling ideas permeate. Discussing the emergence of an alternative Palestinian scene inside the Green Line, Karkabi reflects: “expressions of expressions of nationalism had to be muted, obscured or at the very least, combined with Jewish-Israeli performers.” (2013) The search for space for the performance of an explicitly Palestinian music is therefore a struggle in an industry and public sphere set by the colonial *nomos*. Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury connect the related process to the Israeli effort to “erase Palestine”, with a dual purpose:

“eliminating Palestinian history and replacing it with Jewish history. These processes were implemented using powerful state institutions such as media, education, and carefully designed military service... Like Palestinian history, cultural expressions reflecting Palestinian identity and narrative came close to being a taboo in the public sphere.” (2017, 402)

I have begun this case study non-chronologically, with one of the most formative experiences of Saied’s exposure to music, to which he looks back as representing a learning curve on the position of Palestinians and Palestinian musicians in the Israeli state. Saied’s oral narrative suggests a view of his teenage self coming to terms with the world and looking for explanations:

“Eventually you're going to talk politics and it's going to blow up in your face because the other side was raised on, ‘This is Israel, this is our land.’ But for me, for my teenage years, this is how I got to understand Palestine. That was the beginning of my political education, I think, and building up an ideology and an understanding of the situation we’re living in. I would say it started at the age of 15, 16 and lasted until the beginning of my 20s, all the confusion of having to pick a side and understanding what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s happened. I’d say that was it. I’m kind of glad it happened when it happened – in a place that I was ready to understand it. And today, that’s all I represent.”

Saied's telling of the story switches between a young realisation towards explaining an outlook on the world of music and politics that he maintains in adulthood and is revealing of the position he operates from today. The rest of this chapter will look to what is presented and why. While the comments above don't focus on music, perhaps echoing points made by Nadeem (Dickinson 2013) on the avowal to resist in whatever form available in the place of exile, the development of Saied's Palestinian consciousness is told as a reflection on his earlier life at home.

6.2 Gazelles and pianos

Remembering his first contact with music as a toddler, Saied recalls a piano at his aunt's house that quickly became a source of fascination. She and his mother would sing Fairuz and, although he was at that age an unruly "little devil", according to his Grandma, it was soon discovered that Saied had a talent. This was before "Palestine started becoming more and more *there* in my life", which happened in his teenage years. This piano music coincided with family times at the annual olive harvest and gave markers that Saied could later look back on as defining a developing view of rootedness to the land and a history of struggle. To these rural references I argue that the piano itself carries representations and points to contemporary developments in Palestinian music.

"My aunt had a piano at her house. I'm not sure that's the first recollection but that's the strongest. She used to play it but then she gave up but one time when I was there, one of her daughters started playing it and started singing a song that's called *Ya Ghazeyil* ("*Oh Gazelle*"), a really nice song sung by Fairuz. She was playing it and it was absolutely the first time that I could see and comprehend a musical instrument being played. I didn't know the song but I could see the sheets that she was reading the music from, [wondering] 'what is she doing?' And apparently my hearing was really good from a very early stage. When she finished, I crept shyly to the piano and started playing the same thing with one hand, of course with lots of mistakes, and then I moved onto another song. And then my mum noticed and sent me to learn piano..."

Though focusing mainly on instrumental performance, Fairuz remains part of Saied's concert repertoire today.²¹⁵ As a strong memory, *Ya Ghazeyyil* spoke to the natural beauty of the land, represented in the figure of the gazelle, as a gift from God ("تشبه غزلان الربى") and depicting pure love ("وخلي عقد الحب صافي"). The Rahbani Brothers' lyrics also evoke tragedy in a human connection to the land embodied in and betrayed by an elusive figure which keeps running away. Musically, its melody remains within a major mode (*ajam*) and its original 1957 recording features piano alongside Latin percussion and clarinet; it is listed as being based in the Brazilian *baïon* rhythm on an album featuring "mambo" and "bolero" arrangements.²¹⁶

These musical features notably tie into the themes of the first case study in this thesis. But if the 1967-era Fairuz/Rahbani songbook was characterised by intense seriousness and emotion for the exiled Palestinians of Reem Kelani's childhood, what did this seemingly much more frivolous song from a decade earlier mean for Saied and Palestinians in Shefa'amr? What kind of thought processes did Fairuz enable in the "Israeli" context? In Chapter 3, I analysed how the "*za'atar w zeit*" existence of Palestinian song formed part of a musical experience in which Fairuz was also present. Saied remembers that this period of his life also involved rural life, despite living in the city:

"That's the earliest thing I remember I think, going to that land and helping with olive picking, usually in October. And all the family is there. My grandfather used to own it and then passed away and gave it to my dad. And I remember he had a partner, they used to share it half-half, and our family would be there and their family would be there. It's just beautiful. A week or ten days of olive picking... we had 40 or 50 olive trees. It's really cool, I wish I could show you some time. We have certificates dating them back... Yeah that's a good point actually because now they're going to expand one of the highways and they're going to take some of that land, and in that bit that they're going to take there are olive trees that are hundreds of years old. That's kind of shit."

"That custom's been around for so long that when you pass by other people picking olives in their land you wish them to be safe every year, like you would on Christmas or any other important celebratory date. People, or families who are close to each other always tease each

²¹⁵ On the theme of a family house, Rola Azar sang *Beitik ya Sitti al-Khityara* (بيتك يا ستي الختيرة) as part of Saied's group performance on Ehna TV. (2015)

²¹⁶ Featured on "Fairuz Sings". (Parlophone, 1957) The influence of Brazil endures in music performance in Lebanon. (Messeder 2018)

other about how many olives they got this year. And of course it's a reason for families to gather in nature and spend time together."²¹⁷

Looking back, Palestine may have been more “there” than it felt to Saied. While he notes that his parents had become disinterested in politics, he also recalls that “*muzaharat*” (demonstrations), the *Nakba*, and *Yowm al-Ard*, “Land Day”, were always in the background, particularly on his mother’s side of the family, but “were terms that I didn’t really understand”.

Discussing Armenian lullabies in hostile conditions in Turkey, Bilal writes that the disappearance of certain stanzas containing memories of violent repression “reminds us that there are things that are repressed”. (2006, 83) Such repression can be said to have marked Palestinian existence in the years after the *Nakba*, impacting a remaining minority population described by Robinson as leaderless, impoverished and predominantly peasant in origin. (2013, 30) Strands of representation connected to the land have flourished since:

“Some iconic objects of commemoration include olive trees, stone houses built in old villages, oranges, keys, and embroidered dresses. These objects are overwhelmingly associated with prelapsarian village life in Palestine, and were invoked as signifiers of Palestinianness once the nationalist movement re-emerged in the mid-1960s.” (Khalili 2007, 6)

The imagery of peasant connections to the Palestinian soil have remained central to narratives of resistance and *sumud*, evoked in song (Sayigh 2007; Swedenburg 2003, 22) and with the olive harvest itself becoming a day of national mobilisation during the *Intifada*, in addition to Land Day. (Lockman and Beinín 1989, 390) Other Fairuz songs similarly depict gazelles and flora and have remained within Palestinian spheres of expression. (Asmar 2013; Stone 2008) Yet some writers challenge the notion that this imagery carries any relevance at all for young Palestinians, and particularly those in the urban environments of the *dakhil*. The emergence of hip-hop, writes McDonald, proves that, “The tired clichés of olive trees, the land, and rural practice no longer resonated with a new generation of Palestinian youth living on the urban peripheries of the nation-state.” (2013, 247)

²¹⁷ Interview in London, October 2015.

Does the idyllic rural landscape sung about by Fairuz jar with the experiences of the '48 Palestinians at a time of modernising urbanisation? Hatim Kanaaneh, in his memoirs of living and working mainly in the town of Arrabeh, 15km from Shefa'amr, points to a struggle in the opposite direction. After the Land Day massacre in 1976:

“Arab farmers started reclaiming their fields from years of neglect and overgrowth and planting them with olive trees to re-establish their de facto ownership. Because of this long drawn-out struggle against both the British and Israel, land has acquired symbolic and sentimental value much in excess of its actual worth in terms of real estate or productivity value.” (2008, 148)

Kanaaneh's words resound with Saied's depiction of collective dedication to the olive harvest in a seemingly apolitical upbringing, and connect to the theme explored in more detail on the role of social movements among youth in historic Palestine. Furthermore, this narrative on the symbolism at the heart of material struggles is suggestive of other lines of relevance for the Fairuz/Rahbani “rural” subject matter and sound world. I suggest that a process of historical excavation that occupied Saied's mind after the experience at the Rabin music project did not mean a return to the clichés of the past, as implied by McDonald. Such a return to seeing the value of the olive harvest was, as Kanaaneh shows, a conscious response to oppression and a way of re-establishing community control. Put differently, Turino argues with regards to Zimbabwe:

“When I insist that distinctive indigenous lifeways remain vital among certain contemporary Zimbabweans, I am not romanticizing some imaginary cultural difference or ‘tribal fantasy.’” (Turino 2000, 42)

While Saied went on to study the *Nakba* and document the words of his grandfather on his familial expulsion in 1948, his vision for music was not of “retraditionalizing the country”, as Caton writes on a group of poets in Yemen. (2013, 233) His own musical approach stands in contrast to traditionalist or rurally-referential versions.

In Saied's recollection, a wide-eyed excitement towards the piano at the age of four led him to grasp for the first notes of *Ya Ghazeyyil*, following his cousin's performance on the instrument. Our first case study looked briefly at Reem Kelani's affinity for the instrument (and for songs containing gazelles). But, with the land-based references which made their way to him in this

small city, and in light of his later attachment to the *oud*, why did Saied maintain the connection over the years? A point worth making involves access. Musicians in Gaza report of never having seen a piano in somebody's home,²¹⁸ but the integration of '48 Palestinians in the Israeli economy, however unequal, has meant that the same borders and barriers affecting those in Gaza do not apply. The point should not be overstated however, and Saied points out that his teacher Areen Sheeti was the only female teacher in Shefa'amr with a piano in her house. But the aesthetic influence of the instrument after that initial encounter with Fairuz, which was long lasting, and its use in Saied's band draws parallels with others including Reem Kelani, Basel Zayed, a host of keyboard players and with one of Saied's major influences, Ziad Rahbani. Saied's recent projects include a group with university friend and pianist Akram Haddad that lasts to this day (see below) and a London collaboration with experimental pianist Filipe Sousa in 2016.²¹⁹ It was during this period that Saied reflected in more detail on his familial connection to the land of his grandparents, and the enduring influence of novelist Ibrahim Nasrallah.

6.3 Al-Damun: legends, the land and the internally cleansed

*The land, the peasant, persistence,
Tell me how can these be subdued?
This trinity, how can it be overcome?*

Mahmoud Darwish

"There will always be something that matters more than our brother's blood, and more than our own blood: this land Yusuf. This land."

Daher al-Umar al-Zaydani in Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Lanterns of the King of Galilee*

In his early 20s, Saied decided to record the autobiographical stories of his maternal grandfather, Stephan Khoury, born to Christian Palestinian family whose village of al-Damun

²¹⁸ *Oud* player Reem Anbar lived in Gaza for 27 years but only ever saw pianos at the Edward Said Conservatory for Music and at the residence of a French aid organisation. (Conversation with the author, March 2018)

²¹⁹ See the piece *Dark Matter* by Saied Silbak and Filipe Sousa. (YouTube, May 2016)

was ethnically cleansed during the Zionist offensives of 1948. Saied's hunger for an oral narrative came on the heels of self-questioning of his role in the regional music scene and was spurred on by involvement in a political crowd, turning him onto reading Pappé's work on the *Nakba* (2006) and, no less influential, the epic works of Palestinian novelist Ibrahim Nasrallah (2015; 2012). I place Saied's focus on oral transmission in relation to a vast tradition of epic tales in the Arab world, and later towards a growing field dedicated to preserving the memory of lost villages, towards countering Zionist narratives and struggling for justice. (Sirhan 2014; Zochrot 2014; Robinson 2013; Davis 2011; Slymovics 1998) I argue that Saied's presentation of Khoury is constructed around narrative forms encompassing tragedy, *sumud* and resistance heroism, towards the focus of our final two sections on building a social movement in music and Palestinian nationalism.

Saied grandparents were among the 300-350,000 people internally displaced within the borders of the state of Israel when it declared "independence" during the *Nakba* (Masalha 2005, 11); more than 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed by Zionist forces. (Pappé 2006b) Like many other refugees who were children at the time, Saied's grandfather remembered the story of his family's expulsion graphically. The area around their village, Damun, was under attack and the men had gone to confront the Zionists militarily. Armed with whatever inadequate weaponry they had left in the wake of the crushing defeat of the British-led repression of the revolt of the 30s, the rotten fruits of this historic loss ripened in 1948. This was no war, it was paramilitary colonialism designed to displace a nation; the horrors wrought upon the bodies of unarmed Palestinians at Deir Yassin were visited in all of their supremacist physicality upon the land of Palestine. (Abu Sitta 2016, 83) Damun was reduced to rubble. Khoury would spend the rest of his upbringing and the rest of his life barely 10km away in the city of Shefa'amr. Like his parents before him, Saied grew up there. Studying in London, where the modern state of Israel is viewed with uncontested legitimacy, Saied is clear about where home is: "I'm from Palestine."

Around a quarter of the Palestinians who remained in the country after the *Nakba* had been displaced from their homes and villages and had become "internal refugees" or internally displaced persons within the borders of the Israeli state. (Adalah 2011) Of the 95 Bedouin tribes living in the Naqab (Negev) region prior to 1948, only 11 remained after; Israel pursued a policy of forced transfer to Jordan. (Boqa'i 2005) New legal mechanisms, along with the extension of the colonial laws of Britain's occupation were applied to the Palestinians who

remained under Zionist military rule, subject to constant supervision and control.²²⁰ They had been geographically fractured and set apart from their places of origin and any potential for opposition to the occupation state, and in particular the threat of the re-emergence of a struggle for national liberation, had to be dealt with swiftly. Manal Massalha reflects on the consequences of geographical displacement inside historic Palestine for urban Palestinians forced out of port cities and other cosmopolitan centres during the *Nakba*:

“With the loss of major cities, Palestinians lost their centre of gravity. They became scattered, fragmented, even disappeared from the political map as an independent actor and as a people... The destruction of Palestinian cities was not inevitable, but deliberate.” (2014, 38)

The cramped spaces that the displaced Palestinians would come to inhabit were the results of Zionist colonialism, and an “internal otherness” would be forced upon them and maintained by the new regime.²²¹ Cities witnessing widespread destruction and expulsions included Lydd,

²²⁰ Immediately upon its foundation the Israeli state leadership, including Ben Gurion, Chaim Weizmann and other Zionist leaders of the *Nakba* onslaught, oversaw the creation and institutionalisation of legal mechanisms for the new state to exclude the Palestinians from political life and expropriate their property. The demolitions of Palestinian homes and villages were carried out under the Emergency Regulations of 1945, brought in by the British Mandate. Under this law, Israel could declare “closed military zones” in any area it wished, using “security” reasons to effect no-go areas, with the primary aim of Palestinian dispossession; the law was used until 1966 for this purpose. The new ruling class swiftly built on the draconian measures introduced by the British, through the 1949 Emergency Regulations 5709, allowing the ‘defence’ authorities to declare that *populated* Arab villages were closed military zones and expel the inhabitants. (Jiryis 1976, 90-91) Measures that followed included:

- The Absentee Property Law (1950), which allowed the Custodian of Enemy Property (later renamed the Custodian of Absentees’ Property), an Israeli official, to reappropriate the land and property of anyone considered an absentee;
- The Land Acquisition Law (1953), seen as the “final step” in transferring Absentee Property to the Israeli state and validating any prior expropriations retroactively (Bisharat 1994);
- The Prescription Law (1958) drastically increased the period of time that Palestinians had to prove their occupancy of their land to 15 and in some cases 25 years, allowing the state to act with impunity and knock back anyone who lacked the right evidence that their family had inhabited their home. (Abu Hussein 2003, 118)

Following the annexation of Jerusalem in 1967, all of these laws were applied to the conquered area - the homes of almost all of the refugees deemed “absent” following the *Naksa* were claimed as Israeli state property.

²²¹ Allied to this project for material displacement was an ideological offensive, warning of the demographic dangers posed by the Palestinian minority. Ben Gurion argued that the Arab population should never be allowed to exceed 15% of the population of Israel as the state implemented martial law upon the conquered remainees. Vindictive measures included the denial of spouses in the West Bank and Gaza to be reunited. With the end of martial law in 1966 and the rise of the Palestinian resistance movement, Zionist ideologues grappled with new repressive measures to maintain the status quo. In September 1976 a secret memorandum by Interior Ministry official Israel Koenig to President Rabin warned of rising “nationalistic momentum” and was tasked with controlling local authority budgets and paying off compliant Palestinian community leaders, while starving their localities of the funds given to Jewish communities. According to Jonathan Cook:

Ramle, Jaffa, Haifa and Acre; the populations of Safad and Tiberias were expelled in their entirety to make way for cities which are now almost exclusively Jewish.²²² Many more fled from their villages and barely a fifth of the Palestinians overall remained in the Israeli state. While most of the refugees ended up in camps in neighbouring countries, those internally displaced moved wherever they could and usually set up makeshift dwellings on the outskirts of other smaller cities or surviving villages, physically set apart from the locals.

Before the *Nakba*, grandfather Khoury's village of Damun had around 1,520 inhabitants, all of whom were expelled by Zionist forces in 1948.²²³ Though the paramilitaries claimed that the evacuations expressed "security" concerns – as they would later as statesmen justifying further colonial encroachments – research shows that just 25 of the villagers were considered "suspects", which usually meant that they were suspected members of the Mufti's party. (Pappé 2006, 22) Those who had not fled Damun in desperation after the fall of Acre and Haifa were expelled when Zionist forces took the village. Israeli completely destroyed it and built no settlements its place. Damun was one of 15 villages in the Haifa-Acre region "wiped off Palestine's map", with all houses, buildings and farms blown up to prevent the villagers returning. (Pappé 2006, 109; Zochrot 2014)

Remembering his grandfather's description, Saied hints at the rural life and livelihood of the village in the years, decades and centuries before its destruction.²²⁴ There were buildings set out for livestock, human habitation and those who passed away were buried nearby. Damun was a small but multiconfessional rural community, stamped by 14th Century crusaders who gave it its name. (Khalidi 1992) In 1945, 70 out of 1,310 inhabitants were counted as Christian and the rest Muslim.²²⁵ According to a report published by the Badil resource project, "Villagers produced mats and baskets from the esparto grass and rushes that grew along the

"Their continuing presence threatened to expose as hollow Israel's carefully crafted image as a state that was both Jewish and democratic, and served as a lingering reminder that the Jewish state stood on the ruins of Palestinian society." (Masalha 2005)

²²² There were, of course, stories of cities and villages which held out. Palestinians in Nazareth notably hung on to their city in the face of Zionist plans for evacuation, as did many who remained in Jerusalem. Ben Gurion instead decided to colonise the land to the north, creating Upper Nazareth, a Jewish city above the shadow of a ghettoised Nazareth and the ethnically cleansed local villages like Saffuriya, whose Muslim inhabitants faced Zionist attack as they broke their fast for Ramadan. (Cook 2016)

²²³ While Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé both report that Damun was captured in July 1948, the second stage of Operation Dekel, Palestinian historian Arif al-Arif dates its capture much earlier in late May, following the fall of Acre, 11.5km away. (Zochrot 2014)

²²⁴ Hatim Kanaaneh suggests that Damun, like his own village of Arrabeh, had been inhabited for 4,000 years. (2015)

²²⁵ Additional information from the Arabic aleom.net. (Accessed 2 February 2016)

Na'amin river. They also grew wheat, sorghum, barley, olives, watermelons and cantaloupes.” (Badil 2000) There were also vineyards, two schools and a reputedly impressive mosque rivalling the 16th Century *masjid* al-Jazzar in Acre.

Saied was keen to retell Stephan Khoury’s story:

“Here's what I got from my grandfather before he passed away. I even have the story recorded. My grandparents came from a village called Damun. Of course, the village was destroyed in 1948 and the only thing that’s left nowadays is mainly stones and graves as well as one building where they used to bring the animals to drink, if I’m not mistaken. When my grandfather was about 14, the men of the village had to leave in order to go to Shafa’amr in order to fight the Zionists who came to evacuate it.²²⁶ My grandfather was left alone with the sheep in the woods for five days while the men were fighting in another city. At the end, the Zionists won of course - they had more weapons and more support so my grandparents had to leave their village and go to the nearest city, in this case Shafa’amr. What I got from them is that Muslims and Christians were living alongside each other peacefully and harmoniously in Damun. The religious division in its critical intensity started after Israel was born.”²²⁷

There is, of course, no verification of Khoury's story, which clearly places its teller in an important position in defence of the livestock, but there is no doubting his upbringing as a shepherd, and the facts of the Zionist expulsion and destruction of Damun are indisputable. For a young Christian boy, the protection of the *halal* had connotations connecting the act of bravery to the religious practices of his Muslim neighbours, expressing something of communality that had existed between Palestinian social communities, and which was disrupted critically with the *Nakba*, as Saied points out. This social fabric was torn asunder as the Damun refugees scattered to other parts of the Galilee, to the villages and towns of Kabul,

²²⁶ Although they occupied it as a launchpad for the attempted capture of Nazareth, the Zionists were unsuccessful in their attempts to completely take Shafa’amr. Nevertheless, Israel would prevent the return of Palestinian refugees from the area in January 1949, loading them onto trucks and dumping them back across the border in Jordan. (Badil 2008)

²²⁷ Email discussion, July 2016.

Tamra, Abelin, Magd al-Krum, Sha‘b²²⁸ and Shafa‘amr, while around round half of the villagers fled the country.²²⁹

Where does the historian place telling and retelling of Khoury’s Damun story in relation to oral history and Palestinian narratives? And why did Saied choose to tell it in London? I argue that the dramatisation of loss connects with Arab and Palestinian traditions of heroic storytelling. Told in connection to the material experience of ethnic cleansing in 1948, such stories point to recent attitudes among a section of Palestinian youth in the *dakhil*, towards reclaiming a forbidden history which reverberates in an unequal present.

Stephan Khoury’s concern for social property is echoed in the remembrances of others who were young at the time of the *Nakba*. In a June 2005 interview in Tripoli, Lebanon, refugee and village book writer Hussein al-Lubani “al Damuni” complains:

“This new generation thinks that we were all kings back then. They don’t know that all the people were essentially shepherds, and there weren’t any bathrooms or bedrooms. But they don’t want to hear this – they want me to paint an image of our poor modest village to be that of something recent and modern. They don’t want to accept the fact that we were riding donkeys and walking around barefoot.” (Davis 2011, 112)

Like Stephan Khoury, al-Lubani²³⁰ was a child in Damun and his narrative implores today’s generation to remember the way things were. Ahmed al-Haaj, attending a high school in Gaza at the time of the *Nakba*, tells Baroud of the “wonder animal” Baraka the cow, who frightened his family in Al-Sawafir when she walked into unsafe territory; the family slept under the stars as rumours spread of houses being burned down. Unlike Khoury’s story of these times, Baraka sadly couldn’t be saved from her own adventurism and fell to her death. (Baroud 2018, 63)

²²⁸ In a 1986 letter to fellow literary figure Samih Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish writes of a visit to al-Birweh, the village of his birth: “We went down into the valley that swerves and leads to the southeast, opening to a wellspring in a meadow that led us to the village of Sha‘b—this is where my mother’s relatives live and where her family members were arriving from the village of Damun, which fell to the occupation. There, after a few days, the farmers from the nearby villages gathered, those who sold their wives’ gold, to buy French-made rifles to liberate al-Birweh.” (1989)

²²⁹ Mariam Itani documents the items carried by Palestinian refugees to Egypt in words and photographs. Those from Damun brought embroidered prayer mats and jars of sand gathered from the ground of the village. (Itani 2010, 49)

²³⁰ This naming of refugees after their lost villages is also noted among internally displaced Palestinians. As Slymowics writes: “Post-1948 conditions of displacement gave rise to circumstances in which a person from the destroyed village of Ruways, for example, would take the surname Ruwaysi – someone from Ruways – instead of the customary clan eponymic.” (1998, 201)

Nadia Sirhan positions the Arab oral tradition for epic tales, legends, myths, proverbs, anecdotes and folklore towards the religious literary practices of the region, emphasising the high value placed on oral transmission, connected to the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad. (2014, 37) Moreover, heroic resistance to suffering and tyranny persists as a theme of both Sunni and Shi'a Islamism, promoting legends of self-sacrifice, models of emulation and religious authenticity. (Khalili 2007; Aghaie 2004) Narratives of heroism have long been a central part of tradition in Islamic and Arab literary culture. (Jayyusi 2005) While Saied came from a Christian family and came to reject religion from an early age (a source of resentment for his Grandma), his love of epic Arabic stories flourished during his teenage years, characterised by questioning his present and seeking to preserve his family history through adding rings to the chains of transmission. Novelist Ibrahim Nasrallah was influential:

“it’s such a beautiful way to write history. I might sound arrogant here but I want to sound modest in saying we should know it and be proud of it. And I don’t exclude any other society or any other culture but I’m just giving mine the benefit of where it reached and what has happened to it recently... what we see today is merely an outcome of political games and the destruction caused by the imperialist system, individualism and power games.”

Seeing Nasrallah’s work as suggesting an alternative, presenting “equality” and people being able to “live their lives freely”, Saied loved reading *Lanterns of the King of Galilee* (2015), a dramatised historical account of the life of Daher al-Umar al-Zaydani (1689-1775). In the novel, Daher al-Umar’s life is charted by Nasrallah from childhood in the city of Tiberias, born into relative nobility, his father serving as multazim, tax collector for the Ottoman Empire. Unable to be breastfed by his real mother, the boy drinks milk from the horse Halima, an act markedly significant for a spiritual and material connection to the land which Umar and his adoptive mother, actually his older sister, maintain throughout the story²³¹; Najma never wears shoes and walks barefoot to feel closer to the earth. Daher’s spirit of fairness and solidarity leads him to witness the Ottoman siege and massacre at Bi’na and as multazim after his father he quickly becomes an enemy of the Empire, rescuing neighbouring villages and cities from cruel leaders appointed by a succession of bloodthirsty Pashas governing from Damascus. In

²³¹ There are links here to themes in more ancient texts as the philosophical novel *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* by 12th Century Arab Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufail, tells the tale of a man born out of the earth and raised by a gazelle. (Jayyusi 2005, 9)

the course of a few decades Daher came to rule a virtually autonomous Palestine, setting his forces up for wider confrontation with the Ottoman state. Despite his wealth the humility of Daher and Najma is poignant throughout the novel, modernising Acre and other towns and refusing to bow to extortion. As the sultan's forces close in around them at Tiberias, Daher tells his people,

“Life will proceed normally... We're going to buy and sell, cook and bake. We'll go fishing too, since they can't blockade us from the lake, and if weddings have been planned, they'll be celebrated at their scheduled times. We're not going to let them control our lives just because they have more cannons than we do!” (2015, 276)

Faced with betrayal from his brother, sons and closest allies, Daher remarks of the land being more important than blood.²³²

Despite its forced obscurity as another “number” of the villages destroyed by the Zionists after 1948, Damun is mentioned eight times in *Lanterns of the King of Galilee*, underlining the historical importance of seemingly small villages when it came to trade and local power relations. Shafa'amr is a scene of conquest for Daher's estranged son Uthman and is pivotal to those plotting on the side of the pashas. The centrality of these locations perhaps shaped Saied's response, evoking times long past when the *halal* described by Stephan Khoury was a living and breathing component of Palestinian social life. Tiberias, much more than Damun, was a commercial and political centre with bustling agricultural imagery. Acre was fast becoming a mercantile centre and was, despite overall Ottoman control, in Palestinian hands.²³³ To Saied, learning of the *Nakba* and of the land his family had left behind, concepts of political and economic independence were highly influential.

In his introduction to the novel, Nasrallah writes of his efforts to uncover a virtually unknown figure, aiming to make Daher “a luminous part of our popular consciousness and the ongoing struggle of the people who have populated and given life to the land of Palestine.” (2004, x) In

²³² Challenging late historian Albert Hourani's view of Daher al-Umer's fiefdom as a “little kingdom,” Nur Masalha argues that it would be more accurately described as an emirate or a “sovereign ‘frontier state’” encompassing a majority of historic Palestine. While views of Daher's reign as representing an early nationalism are wide of the mark, the period was nonetheless one in which Palestine came to be treated as a distinct regional entity by Ottomans, Europeans and a variety of local forces. (Masalha 2018, 236-240)

²³³ Nyman reports on the “gentrification” and Judaisation under way in modern Acre, as private developments are thrown up as neighbourhoods are run down and neglected in the majority Arab city. (2016)

the face of Israeli claims to have occupied a land without a people,²³⁴ Nasrallah says, his research on Daher al-Umer had “laid a wonderful new foundation for my identity, enabling me to trace the roots that go so deep into the land of Palestine”. His work, in other words, would be an exercise in transmission for his Palestinian audience and to Nasrallah himself as an author. Through understanding the historic endurance of the people in the land, according to this narrative, Palestinian feet become closer to the soil.

Saied had therefore engaged in a conscious effort at unearthing the past for understanding the present, through which he would continue to narrate his grandfather’s story. As noted earlier in the case study, Saied’s exploration of this literature came at a time of both musical experimentation and social rupture from the dominating and normalising structures of a colonialist status quo. The narrative of the land, Fairuz songs, the *Nakba* and epic tales of overcoming the odds and surviving all contribute to expressing this consciousness. But so too does the act of continuing the narration, excavating his grandfather’s memories and speaking them out loud. I liken this process to the recent attempts of Palestinian exiles to gather information and materials on the pre-1948 era, and document their histories in village books. Rochelle Davis writes that the latter allows former peasants themselves:

“to valorize their contributions to the national history of Palestinians, thus contributing to the development of the nationalist discourse that asserts a Palestinian presence on the land that is rooted in the histories of peoples’ everyday lives.” (2010, vxiii)

In presenting the physical and moral characteristics of the villages, Davis argues, such authors bring together stories towards a collective narrative aimed at a readership beyond their own age group. (2010, 71) The oral tradition continues to play a “crucial role in educating” new generations of Palestinians, both inside and outside of Palestine (Hammer 2005, 43) This movement takes place in the face of the “dispersion, dispossession, fear and uncertainty” accompanying statelessness and dispossession of material resources and archives, which impact on the abilities of survivors of Zionist violence to speak of their experiences. (Khalili 2007, 167) ’48 Palestinians face the additional stigma of non-recognition by the state and

²³⁴ Golda Meir's infamous words came in a 1969 interview with the Sunday Times: “there was no such thing as Palestinians... It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.”

cultural mainstream under which they live,²³⁵ with internally displaced refugees such as Saied's grandparents disenfranchised from the Palestinian leadership,²³⁶ in addition to the violence and repression which governed their experience in the Israeli state. Echoing Khalili's analysis that oral accounts are often formed in opposition to elite, official histories, Baroud reveals of his own research that he was "compelled by the imperative to relocate the centrality of the Palestinian narrative from an Israeli perspective to a Palestinian one, especially one that overlooks the typical elitist narrative and focusses instead on re-telling the story from the viewpoint of ordinary, poor, underclass, and working-class Palestinians." (2018, 267)

Saied sums up his own thoughts on the matter, emphasising the need for transmission to involve music alongside oral narration and other forms of expression:

"I think having an artistic spirit amongst Palestinian society is definitely *sumud*, and perhaps even more than just the basic ability to simply stay and survive."²³⁷

Our final two sections will look at the musical form taken on by Saied's plea for resistance to imperialism and colonial racism, before moving onto discussing the space and prospects for '48 Palestinians to build and develop their own story.

²³⁵ In academic writing, as in the pronouncements of political figures and musicians, we see a connection between the terminology used to describe the Palestinians in Israel and questions over the nature and function of the state. Smootha (2003), Kasher (2014), Lowrance (2005) and a wide range of other academics and commentators see that whatever the scale of marginalisation faced by the Palestinian people, usually labelled here as "Palestinian Israelis" or "Arab citizens of Israel", such problems can be resolved by a reformed Israeli state alongside an independent state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza – in other words by a form of the much vaunted "two state solution". However, Mazen Masri (2015) questions both the practical underpinning of "Jewish and democratic" definitions of the state of Israel and the viability of the two state model. Arguments for a Palestinian state "side by side" with the state of Israel, according to Masri,

"would actually give Israel more room to assert and emphasize its Jewish character at the expense of the PCI [Palestinian Citizens of Israel], rendering their citizenship even more flawed, and exacerbating the current state of inequality between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel."

Masri bases his conclusions on analysing the instability of a constitutional system lacking a finite constitution, and which has since 1948 defined Israel as a "Jewish and democratic state", while excluding Palestinians from any concept of "the people" with whom supreme authority resides in a democracy. The "still unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which because of its nature as a conflict between a native population and a settler-colonial state has a strong impact on shaping the state and its constitutional order." For the Palestinians, the current order "translates into a colonial reality in every aspect of life", which is resisted through grassroots opposition to such policies as the Praver Plan for the ethnic cleansing and confiscation of the Naqab/Negev; the Palestinian Citizens of Israel are not "passive actors."

²³⁶ Massad writes of the changing official position of the PLO in the years of the Oslo process, beginning in earnest way before its 1988 Declaration of Independence, which didn't mention the diaspora or "Israeli Palestinians", only that it would fight for a "state of Palestinians wherever they may be." (2010, 106)

²³⁷ Email discussion, July 2016.

6.4 An even tougher act of resistance: instrumental music and the social movement

“All resistance acts are needed. Art can definitely be considered another layer of resistant act. And instrumental music is more and more simply because people have got used to having lyrics which makes writing instrumental music an even tougher act of resistance.”

“I’ll kill you if you call me an Israeli Arab! [laughs]”²³⁸

In Saied’s artistic philosophy, there is no contradiction between a commitment, on the one hand, to the anti-imperialist politics of Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah and socialist composer Ziad Rahbani, and, on the other, to performing music where words are almost absent. Titles are important, he says, hinting at their power to provoke discussion of real life struggles. In performance, he presents solo *oud* or ensemble pieces in musically challenging compositions and arrangements, with a quietly mischievous stage persona, and sometimes wearing a black and white *kuffieh*. Alongside his performance studies at Guildhall in London in 2006, Saied took part in jams with other musicians, appearing obsessed with artistic progress, and often talking of going back to Palestine, of building interest back home. His concern with being understood by audiences is palpable:

“Some people might see it as rubbish, as bullshit; this kind of thing can be interpreted in many ways... At the end of the day you can only hope that it gets to people, you know?”

This final section of the Saied Silbak case study is focused on two main themes, looking at the related issues of aesthetic presentation and social movement. Through analysing Saied’s musical practices, I take a cue from the writing of El-Ghadban and Strohm (2013) on the complicated issue of instrumental music in the Palestinian context. In a period marked, at least partially, by the promotion of non-threatening forms of instrumentalism through the European-funded NGOisation of the West Bank, the findings of these writers raise questions on the artistic choices of Palestinians born into the supposedly separate terrain of the Israeli state. I draw on new research by Massalha (2014) and Karkabi (2013; 2018) to argue that the search for alternative spaces and modes of nationalist expression is a historic trend of the Palestinian

²³⁸ Interview in London, 29 May 2016.

social movement in the *dakhil*, expressed in Saied's refusal to work within Israeli institutions and, I suggest, his vision for music. Referring to struggles further afield, I see acts of collective imagination as key to understanding the revolutionising of performance alongside overt acts of political protest.

6.5 *W Ba'dein?!*

After graduating from Beit al Musiq'a in Shafa'amr in 2005, Saied met pianist and composer Akram Haddad, forming a musical friendship that would blossom over the next few years:

"I met [Akram] when I did my first degree at the university in Haifa. I was studying psychology and music and his girlfriend, now wife, was there. And we met up and played and that's how it started."

They first appeared onstage together in 2012 in a project they titled *W Ba'dein?! (وبعدين!؟)* - "and then what?!"), an album's worth of material that they have yet to record in a studio. The compositions centrally feature Saied's *oud* and Akram's acoustic piano, alongside electric bass and drums/percussion; the concerts sometimes featured a guest vocalist. In 2016 Saied reported that, "We performed that project back then and now we're performing it again in Paris in July."²³⁹ As a group of compositions, some of which originate in the period when Saied began to separate from working with Israelis, it is noteworthy that it still hasn't been recorded aside from online videos of live shows. This may point to the relative importance of live work for the two musicians as a source of livelihood. But it may also reference an unfinished quality to the musical conversation between Saied and Akram, as two Palestinian artists rather than an act of coercion or compromise involving the Israeli side. I see the aesthetic qualities of the music as carrying this rebellious streak and present the following description of Saied's work as a prelude to discussing instrumentalism in the Palestinian context.

Recordings of the "album" tracks include a 2015 live performance of *Bi Frijha Rabbak*²⁴⁰ ("God will solve it"), in a percussive arrangement with at least four distinct segments.

²³⁹ Saied and Akram won the music prize from the Institut Culturel Franco-Palestinien in association with the Jerusalem Fund, resulting, among other things, in a one-week residency at the Palest'In & Out festival 2016.

²⁴⁰ Concert recorded in Haifa by Ehna.tv.

Beginning with a quick 7-beat, the piece features quick stops and starts, with *oud* and piano in rhythmic unison, and staccato effects punctuated by extended chords and homophonic melodic textures. A development section is then enacted, suggesting a dialogue between Akram and Saied as they trade improvised phrases over a 4-beat section underpinned by rising chords in the bass and background percussion; Youssef Hbeish switches from hand-played snare and cymbals to *riqq* and quiet bass drum. Saied improvises around piano chords in *nahawand*/minor modality, introduced after a repeated melody in half-time, playing around the *nahawand* and *hijaz* tetrachords; the contemplative serenity of this section is interrupted loudly by a 4/4+5/8 piano/*oud* ostinato backing a frantic drum solo before these rhythmic-melodic phrases are elongated, brought briefly back to a 7. Towards the end, Ihab Droubi's slap bass punctuates a comparatively straight riff featuring syncopated 16th note phrases in 4-time before an odd-cadence ending.

In performance, there are wry smiles between Saied and the other musicians, hinting at the cheekiness of the subject matter reflected in the title. Saied's taste for compositional playfulness is expressed through more extreme rhythmic and melodic modulation within a set framework (just over five and a half minutes) and somewhat rigid structure; the "little devil" of Saied's youth now operates within organised musical structures, built around a sequence of distinct but overlapping sections. For this piece at least, the improvisational periods follow set patterns of bars and don't require cues, before piano improvisation follows *oud*. While some of Saied's solo *oud* sets feature longer *taqasim* – as do some other pieces in the *W Ba'dein?! project* with Akram Haddad – it is evident that some pieces are written with less room for improvisation, at least temporally. The exception in *Bi Frijha Rabbak* is the drum solo which, if it is still kept within a certain structure and length, is nevertheless given more time to develop.

Bala Isem ("With no name") is a more expansive piece, 14-plus minutes, with a searching quality, at times rhythmically relentless, at others more subdued. Its structure is sandwiched by a rigid bass riff, moving about a harmonic structure referencing flamenco chords. A driving, accelerating first five minutes give way to a metreless solo *taqasim* by Saied's *oud*, which moves the piece on, evolving to conduct the transition to a slower tempo. When the beat comes back in, Akram's piano phrases are responsive, following Saied's lead. Akram's solo, over a 7/16 rhythm, begins to exploit space with a *taqasim-on-the-beat* (to borrow a Simon Shaheen piece title), before blues phrases and chordal melodic play hint more strongly at jazz. Youssef Hbeish's percussion solo positions bongos alongside Arabic *tabla*, with a single bass drum hit

beginning each bar of 7. The drummer explores polyrhythmic ideas, as the metre mutates to a 6, back to a 7, followed by piano-*oud* unison for a staccato ending. *Bala Isem* offers comparatively fewer constraints on the player than *Bi Frijha Rabbak*, with a more open structure allowing soloists greater temporal possibilities for improvisation. The piece revolves around the twists and turns of an almost through-composed structure, underpinned and led on by Saied's *oud* playing.

Instrumentalising resistance

Saied is far from alone on the Palestinian scene in embracing instrumental music, or in seeking to expand the technical boundaries of composition and song, with historical precedent for cosmopolitan approaches to *tarab*. Musicians under the Ottoman and British occupations embraced the localisation of the high Arab arts and folk forms continued to flourish under oppressive conditions. (Bursheh 2013; Tamari and Nassar 2014) After the Palestinian revolution of the 60s, *oud*-toting political songsters combined *taqasim* with anthems of struggle. (Massad 2005; Morgan 1994) By the *Intifada*-era in the 1980s, very different groups such as Al-‘Ashiqeen and Sabreen were presenting high artistic values with poetic sensibility and instrumental prowess, while in other ensembles, electro-*mijwiz* keyboardists performed extensive solos during *dabke* dance-offs.²⁴¹ In recent years exiled musicians from Kamilya Joubran to Issa Boulos have built reputations for artistic rigour and instrumental mastery. Despite the harsh austerity of the Israeli blockade, Gaza has seen a mini-renaissance of young *oud* players.²⁴² Away from the grass roots, ensembles run by the Kamandjati, the Edward Said

²⁴¹ The recorded arrangements of singers like Ibrahim Sbehat and the late Shafiq Kabha, feature drums, guitars and, centrally, virtuoso keyboards imitating the traditional *mijwiz*. The style is linked to traditions in protest song for its commitment to nationalist themes, both musically and lyrically. But it is also noteworthy for extraordinarily long instrumental sections, usually characterised by intricate keyboard solos based on the *maqam* framework of *turathi* music. The associations of call and response between vocals and instruments evoke the *zajjal* oral traditions poet singers performing at weddings and other social events. Of Kabha's many recordings, the 2005 Spotify release *Shabiat*, with the English subtitle “Traditional Folk”, contains epic *dabke* arrangements where vocals become almost secondary. However much the synthesiser may differ timbrally, technically or contextually from the *mijwiz* of the archetypal fellah, through the music of Shafiq Kabha, the soloist is referential to this rural concept, acting to both recreate and commemorate historic Palestine.

²⁴² According to *oud* performer Mohammed Ballour, “*Oud* is the instrument that is most available in Gaza... you cannot easily find other instruments”; Karkabi sees a similarly economic link with the use of synthesizers in Electro-Dabke. (2018) Asked about whether it was an issue not performing with words, Mohammed says he sees music as “a whole language that can be understood by all people.” For Reem Anbar, then based in Gaza City, *oud* performance can be a means to challenge gender expectations. As an *oud* teacher, she sees musicianship as “beyond solely transmitting skills and techniques”, focusing on the therapeutic qualities of instrumental music. (Shehada 2016) The performances of both musicians involve aspects of *turathi* heritage, but

National Conservatory for Music (ENCM) and other outside-funded cultural organisations promote their own elite brand of “peace-building” musicianship. (Beckles Willson 2013) In the post-Oslo period, some Palestinians with Israeli citizenship have brought in elements of rap, reggae and electro music towards cultivating sounds that appeal to both local and international audiences. (Karkabi 2018) Where does Saied belong in all of this? Do ’48 Palestinians on “the inside” actually stand outside of broader processes in the Occupied Territories? And what is (re)presented in his claim to stand for an “even tougher act of resistance” through instrumental music?

Writing on music and power in the Middle East, Nooshin sees the meeting of aesthetic values with ideological, political and social phenomena as central to understanding the broader implications of music:

“The aesthetic dimension is particularly tricky, since any discussion of music and power has to take account of the fact that experiencing music is above all (usually) a pleasurable experience, which can in itself serve a naturalising agenda by which the aesthetic camouflages the ideological or political by deflecting attention from intended meanings. And yet, even where such meanings are hidden, music’s very presence can be a sign of agency.” (2009, 6)

Being understood through the communication of intended meanings seems paramount to Saied’s thought processes and is a common theme among instrumental performers. Ethnomusicologist Chuen-Fung Wong reports on fieldwork with Palestinian oud player Samer Totah, who, like Saied, has worked mainly with wordless forms of composition. (2009) Totah focuses on emotion and historical memory, commemorating such events as the IDF-imposed curfew and siege of Ramallah in 2003. His arrangements are influenced strongly by Totah’s mentor Khaled Jubran and by traditionalist *tarab* expert Ali-Jihad Racy; as well as being a major musical influence (also cited by Saied), Simon Shaheen is seen as “a national hero”. For many Palestinians, writes Wong, artistic progress becomes a way of presenting alternatives, citing the band Sabreen, whose “innovation and professionalism were considered by many as emblematic of the Palestinian musical future”.

look more specifically at developing the *taqasim* and interpreting the works of Arab composers; Reem also has a fondness for Russian music and performs the Soviet anthem Katyusha.

Saied's efforts to present himself as contributing to Palestinian liberation through music are, I argue, expressed both through and beyond the music itself. It is noteworthy that Totah, coming from a similar musical tradition to Saied, also refuses to perform with Israeli musicians in the *dakhil*, and takes an explicitly critical stand towards the European-funded projects in the West Bank. This criticism is echoed by El-Ghadban and Strohm, in an essay charting the development of national ensembles in Egypt and Syria, in a "postcolonial" era that remained out of reach for Palestine. Israeli attempts to assimilate Palestinian and Arab cultures, they argue, led Palestinians to resist certain Westernising impulses of the pan-Arabist project. This means continuing popularity for *tarab*, folklore and other Arab and Palestinian forms of music and, while musicians embraced aspects of modernisation, the village remained "the nucleus of of Palestinian identity in diaspora." (2013, 183) Bands and projects such as Sabreen and El Funoun offer examples where Palestinian musicians were "equally immersed in Arabic art music and Western art music". Such multi-approaches are linked, they write, to the unresolved nature of the Palestinian issue.

Asking the question of how musicians respond to the challenges and cultural brokers behind them, El-Ghadban and Strohm observe that musicians not fitting into accepted frames of aesthetic and political expression tend to be ignored. The instrumentalisation of Palestinian music, with greater emphasis on non-vocal forms in the post-Oslo period, occurs alongside the proliferation of the ESNM, Palestine Youth Orchestra and other ensembles connected to outside patrons and agendas of coexistence with the Israeli occupation.

Avoiding what they see as the problematic tendency to anthologise Palestinian music "through a single theme of resistance", El-Ghadban and Strohm focus on the ability of the Palestinian art scene to "give Palestinians in diaspora a sense of community and transmit the memory of the *Nakba* to the next generation", offering catharsis, or "a process of emotional cleansing." (2003, 184) While I agree that these qualities of music are present and important (see Chapter 8), the emphasis of these writers shifts from a narrative of resistance onto a focus on "survivalism". (2003, 196) A revealing point is that, while emphasising the fanfare greeting Palestinian inclusion in UNESCO, despite the UN (US) rejection of the PA's application for state recognition, no mention is made of the low key but energetic opposition of some musicians to this move, reflected in a 2012 PA security attack on singer Basel Zayed for performing the ironic anthem *Doleh* ("Statehood") in Ramallah. All three of the musicians in this thesis offer critiques of one type of another of PA political and cultural policy.

The problem of instrumentalism identified in the discussion above raises questions of the position of Palestinian musicians within wider Arab traditions of *tarab* and art music. Although there is truth in the urges to escape certain homogenising and Westernising tendencies from both Zionism and Arab cultural elites, connections between the Palestinian and Arab artistic worlds remained fluid, emphasised in Saied's citation of Rahbani, Iraqi *oud* player Munir Bashir and Egyptians Umm Kalthum, Sayyid Darwish and Abdel Halim Hafez. If instrumental expression remains prominent in Palestinian electro/folk sounds and other recent projects, the influence of "*taswiriyya*" ("illustrative") music from outside of Palestine is evident in Saied's music and on a wider scene, with broad implications for music aimed at a social message. The extensive introductions and instrumental passages of the 20th Century greats of Arab music often coincided with eras in which political content was emphasised. Although Abdel Halim made a decision to trade his own instrumental prowess for the microphone, his group continued to perform epic pieces showcasing the skills of other instrumentalists – as well as the Nasserist messages with which he was associated. (Stokes 2010b; ElSheikh 2012)

In 2009 the Nawa association launched a project to recover the lost compositions of Palestinian *oud* player Rawhi al-Khammash (1923-1988). The late musician was born in Nablus and showed prodigious talent, performing with Mohammad Abdel Wahab at the age of 10. Nawa were interested in particular in the extremely productive time al-Khammash spent in Palestine in the nine years before the *Nakba*, when he fled to Baghdad, where he spent much of his life.²⁴³ The outcome of the remarkable work carried out by Jalal and Nawa would be the staging of performances in front of exuberant audiences in the West Bank and in Haifa in 2014. While there were some featured vocalists including Lobna Salameh, much of the concert was instrumentally-based.²⁴⁴ Arrangements were, as much as practically possible, kept faithfully to the instrumental ensemble al-Khammash would have had available. The response to this restaging project underlined a new significance to Palestine's heritage of instrumental music. Like al-Khammash himself, the compositional work had been scattered to the wind by the

²⁴³ Jalal explained that this involved painstaking work to find materials in Lebanon and Syria, and interviews with al-Khammash's former students in Jordan. In the process he and his small research team would boycott the resources centres of the Israeli state, which had forcibly maintained control of Palestinian cultural materials since the *Nakba*. (Conversation with the author, August 2013; see also Brunner 2012)

²⁴⁴ Footage of the concerts has not been publicly released but of the few tracks available on the Nawa Youtube account, only al-Khammash's *Ma Bal 'Aenak Ts'al* (ما بال عينيك تسأل) contains vocals.

occupation. The act of overcoming the odds and bringing this music back to life offered a clear message that historic Palestine could be musically reconstructed.²⁴⁵

Yet, there is appreciable controversy attached to a focus on non-vocal music in the context of the Palestinian national project, with attention given to what is performed and communicated. Musicians speak privately of their issues with Le Trio Joubran, the *oud*-playing brothers seen by some as performing a simplified, Western-friendly version of Arabic music, and who tour mostly in Europe. The turn of Marcel Khalife towards instrumental music, and to some extent away from the Mahmoud Darwish poems and anthems which made him popular among the Palestinians, is viewed with suspicion (see Chapter 8). In a culture based on narratives and oral tradition, there are concerns that music must continue to speak. I see this emphasised in Saied's plea to be understood. Thinking aloud, he asks:

“Do you keep art related to politics? Do you leave lots of space for interpretation? How do you bring it? ...If you are the kind of person that says, ‘oh I don't know, this is how I see it, I don't know what I'm representing...’, you would do the same in your music or in your art whatever art form it is. But if you're very clear and very convinced and you're putting up a fight against something that you know is not right and fair, I think you stick to that throughout your artistic journey.”

Saied's narrative offers the impression of a heightened sense of awareness towards performance strategy, channeling his experiences and views of normalising “coexistence” projects in music, while searching for a role for advanced musical concepts. At the same time, his relationship to composition and to other musicians embraces non-Arab and non-Palestinian influences, carrying the cosmopolitan musical tendencies of Ziad Rahbani among others (Asmar 2013; Stone 2007) and exploring new collaborations with musicians in Europe.²⁴⁶ His music, as described above, expands accepted notions of *tarab* by including piano and other non-traditional instruments, while remaining within the realm of *maqam*. Saied's compositions are angular and unpredictable, carrying features that are not uncommon to jazz and modern Arab musicianship, but rare in musicianship openly constructed in protest. Saied voices the

²⁴⁵ For Basel Zayed, the *oud* player responsible with reproducing the work of al-Khammash as part of the Nawa ensemble, there was a deep connection between the music – based firmly in the “oriental” *maqam* genre – and the people of Palestine. This conviction crossed stylistic and temporary borders towards a time when the Arabic *maqam* system could be seen more clearly as emerging from local folk music. (2013 interview)

²⁴⁶ In a November 2017 project in London, Saied collaborated with a singer in the European classical tradition for an arrangement of a song from Schumann's 19th Century song-cycle *Die Dichterliebe*.

argument that instrumental music is of itself “even tougher” to communicate as a “resistance act”, with audiences used to songs with lyrics, and highlighting that titles can carry broader political meanings. I argue that many of these elements operate beyond the music itself: intentions are explained verbally, eliciting audience responses, such as Saied’s dialogue with the priest for *Bi Frijha Rabbak*. Likewise, Saied makes strategic choices with who, where and under what banner he performs and arguably brings a resistance-based approach in his refusal to conform to the “accommodation” (read “good Arab Israeli”) desired by Brinner. However, Brinner’s characterisation of Shaheen and other ’48 Palestinians who migrated as reactionaries who won’t engage with the “Israeli” cultural mainstream is challenged by Saied’s promise to return “to Palestine” and to build up an audience among other Palestinians. If Saied sees instrumentalist route as tough in a communicative sense, it could also be said that his artistic decisions link his work to the alternative Palestinian futures seen by Wong in the work of Sabreen and others (2009), and resonate with a broader movement for artistic progress. Moreover, choices made on the level of musical sociality present challenging alternative routes for the performances of ’48 Palestinians. The next section will analyse the space for Palestinian narratives within the boundaries of the Israeli state.

Saied and the social movement in the dakhil

“I would say it started at the age of 15, 16 and lasted until the beginning of my 20s, all the confusion of having to pick a side and understanding what's right, what's wrong, what's happened. I'd say that was it. I'm kind of glad it happened when it happened – in a place that I was ready to understand it. And today, that's all I represent.”

Writing on a group of Beirut-based alternative musicians, Burkhalter discusses a “political approach” expressed “mainly in their focus on musical quality and value”, particularly in comparison to the dominance of pan-Arab pop and Saudi TV. (2013) The ability of such artists to critique bourgeois power structures is a theme of the case studies in this thesis and provokes thought on the subjects of music and political activism. For Saied, Palestinian resistance and art are intimately connected, evoking the land, history and, ultimately, the future. As shown in McDonald’s work on Jordan-based Palestinian band Baladna, separations between music based

on rural tradition, political song and instrumentalism are not always so clear.²⁴⁷ Neither, I suggest, are the questions of performance and space. If, as Massalha writes, a “colonial *nomos*” governs existence for Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, such questions as the coherence of musical message is bound up with this social, political and economic experience.

In the face of ongoing hostility towards Palestinian youth in the *dakhil*,²⁴⁸ online Vloggers at 972Mag have documented “The Arab youth mainstreaming Palestinian identity in Israel”, presenting footage of a clash at a DAM rap concert. Student activist Nizar Hlewa tells the camera: “I have found that due to my political activity in school, and contacts with people of that age, more and more of them are saying, ‘I’m Palestinian.’” (Rami Younis 2017) From Haifa, Hisham Naffa, writes of the street mobilisations in many northern towns and cities against Israel’s 2008 bombing of Gaza under the slogan, “Stop the massacre against our people in Gaza!” (2009) Recent protests around Land Day have spread to campaigns for reclaiming lost villages. Following the death of Nazareth-born vocalist Rim Banna, a mini-wave of protest greeted the Times of Israel’s obituary labelling her an “Arab Israeli”, led online by ‘48 Palestinian musicians Tamer Nafar and Maysa Daw. (Brehony 2018) In response to demonstrations in Tel Aviv against the Nation State Law, cementing self-determination as the exclusive right of Zionist Jews, Israeli prime minister Netanyahu took to social media, sharing photos of Palestinian flags on the protests and declaring that, “there is no greater testament to the necessity of this law... We will continue to wave the Israeli flag and sing Hatikvah [the Israeli national anthem] with great pride.” Such openly defiant expressions of Palestinianness contrasted with Hatim Kanaaneh’s reports of the difficulty of raising a Palestinian flag in the Israeli Communist Party-dominated protests of the 70s and 80s. (2008, 137)

Their status as a group outside of the supremacist ruling caste underlines a colonial reality faced by ‘48 Palestinians. (Massalha 2014; Masri 2015; Massad 2003) The heirarchising of

²⁴⁷ “In the suburbs and the syndicates Baladna challenged the audience through more thought-provoking political commentary, instrumental compositions, and martial hymns. Among the cosmopolitan middle class Baladna performed more presentational compositions emphasizing poetic contrast, thick metaphorical and historical references, and more complex instrumental forms and structures.” (McDonald 2003, 194)

²⁴⁸ In June 2017 several ruling Likud Party politicians faced criticism from activists and from liberal Zionist sections of the Israeli establishment by participating in the launch of a new book in Hebrew which called the Palestinian citizens of Israel “parasites”, “a fifth column” and argued for internment camps. At its launch, the text by Raphael Israeli, a Professor Emeritus at Hebrew University and a research fellow at the Truman Institute, was presented by serving transport minister Yisrael Katz as “very profound”, and deserving of “serious discussion.” In May 2017 a new Nation State Bill was passed in the Knesset, degrading Arabic language below official level and declaring that “the right to realize self- determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people.” (Haaretz, 7 May 2017)

space and rights described earlier by Massalha is depicted in Mahmoud Darwish's literary narration of this development:

"The moment they arrived on your land, they defined the parameters of their existence and those of their children. And at the same time they defined yours. The moment they became natives you became a refugee." (Parmenter 1994)

Expelled from their homes in 1948 and their villages destroyed, the descendants of those Palestinians who remained within the borders of the Israeli state now witness the results of their expulsion from the cultural mainstream.²⁴⁹ As Robinson argues, the increasingly instability of the "liberal settler state" itself has at its heart the problem of the limited rights of the Palestinians. (2013, 198) The remainder of this chapter explores a Palestinian response to the "parameters of existence" which are expressed, for nationally conscious, politically-engaged musicians like Saied Silbak, through a lack of space outside of the routes of "normalisation" and "coexistence". Through the experiences described so far, Saied came to a realisation that mainstream routes run counter to the struggle for national rights, comparing his boycott of Israeli musicians and institutions to making a political decision towards abstention from voting in national elections.

Just as electoral boycotts don't necessarily amount to a passive withdrawal from politics, Saied has no intention of exiting the music scene. In the years after his studies at *Beit al-Musiqa*, he began experimenting with other musicians in the local Palestinian music scene, mainly focusing on *oud*, performing along with his longtime musical partner Akram Haddad. In his early 20s in Shafa'amr, Saied began to attract audiences, despite his rejection of Israeli platforms. Seeing the benefits of developing his artistry independent from these structures, he reflects: "Collaboration is a problem, but it also means that there is an audience and a hunger for Palestinian artists who *don't* do that." Here Saied hints that a more grassroots, activist-musicianship, has its potential for success. By this logic, is that having come of age in a music circle of conscious, nationalist Palestinians, others must also be searching for an alternative to collaborating, normalising musical acts.

²⁴⁹ Karkabi has noted that '48 Palestinians' movement against marginalisation and oppression coincides with a "revolt against social and religious controls within their own communities, promoting sexual diversity, gender equality, individual liberties, secularity and a bohemian lifestyle." (2013)

There are historic precedents for this striving for Palestinian space outside of the Zionist-dominated culture industry. Massalha introduces new research on the cultural activities of the Al-Hadaf project, led by the *Abnaa' al-Balad* (sons of the village) organisation²⁵⁰ in the northern town of Umm al-Fahm during the 1980s. Activists set up cultural centres, theatre performances, music classes, and led lectures and sports. Group activities focused on the rights of women and carried a strong commitment to the liberation of all of historic Palestine, connecting its cultural work to “know your homeland” excursions to uprooted Palestinian villages and collecting funds to support the 1987 *Intifada* in Gaza and the West Bank. The cultural activities of Al-Hadaf, like other less overtly political projects emerging in the post-1967 period, received no public funding and no support from the state or media, with those involved working as volunteers and collecting donations from ordinary Palestinians. According to Muhammed, one of the organisation's founders, “Theatre needs a state... and we are stateless.” (Massalha 2014, 215) While the experience of *Al-Hadaf* was temporary,²⁵¹ it received mass local support and, for a period, showed that in the absence of state support, Palestinians could make their own space to offer a platform to grassroots cultural performance.

There are, of course, connecting lines to be drawn with other periods and locations in the history of Palestinian music and cultural production. (see Chapter 7 on Gaza in the first *Intifada*) Although the form may appear far removed from the social centre activism of the Palestinian socialists in Umm al-Fahm in the 1980s, the rebel songs of the 1930s, or the protest singers of the 70s and 80s developed under conditions of hardship, occupation and political repression from the forces allied to the Zionist state. This tradition chimes Saied's political commitment and to his experiential realisation that Shafa'amr was being ruled under an apartheid regime dictating considerations of musical space and performance opportunity. He offers the view that in rejecting Israeli control, a musician in his position would potentially “gain respect and have a bigger audience... it's not the only way to break through, you know,

²⁵⁰ In the wider region *Al-Hadaf* was the name of the PFLP newspaper, edited earlier on by Ghassan Kanafani. The group Massalha describes had definite PFLP links but also involved Ibna' al Balad and other left-nationalist currents.

²⁵¹ As to the reasons for its demise, Massalha cites the rise of the Islamic Movement (which the state tolerated more than the openly socialist organisations), refusing to give *Al-Hadaf* rooms at the schools that it controlled, and the need for *Al-Hadaf* funds to address the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories. In a 1985 interview in Hebrew for *Yediot Ahronot*, the Mayor of Umm al-Fahm complained that, “we have got no sewerage system. Therefore, there are severe diseases which do not exist in other city. There is a shortage of 80 classrooms. The majority of classrooms have got no doors, no windows, and without sanitation. There is no cultural club, not even one public park or basketball court. Umm al-Fahm's football team is heading the list, in B League, yet they travel to Kufur Qasim to get training. What am I asking for? I have not asked for either a swimming pool nor a tennis court.” (Massalha 2014, 273)

to collaborate with Israelis.”

I set youth resistance in the *dakhil* – and Saied’s attempt to “break through” to an audience – against the backdrop of Palestinian leadership of an emerging alternative scene, and a growing field of study connected to social movements combating racism, imperialism, neoliberalism, and movements for socialism in multiple locations. Of particular relevance, I suggest, as a front line of the global fight to build an alternative society (Mcgill 2017), Latin American resistance movements have enlisted forms of new and indigenous-based forms of music. The songs and musical forms attached to the Chavista movement in Venezuela, the socialist movement in Colombia, to Chile or indeed the Cuban revolution (Moore 2006) have presented overt political demands alongside multiple approaches to instrumentalism, where forms and the instruments themselves were seen as important considerations in expressing popular struggle.²⁵²

It seems instructive to compare widespread Palestinian youth disaffection with Israeli electoral politics²⁵³ and support for land reclamation, with the level of shared interest between Bolivian musicians and the election of indigenous president Evo Morales.²⁵⁴ In the midst of the anti-globalisation movement that eventually brought him to power, musicians made many interventions, with local instruments including the charango appearing centrally. (Stobart 2017) Discussing the role of folk music in US anti-war and civil rights movements, Roy views performance as a strategy for victory:

“The claim here is that many people *doing* art, *doing* music, *doing* drama, *doing* literature, not just consuming it, is an extraordinarily powerful mode for both solidifying commitment to

²⁵² Fernando Ríos writes that social movements from the 1950s “paved the way for consolidation of the charango’s status as an emblematic Bolivian national instrument”, alongside non-vocal forms of Andean mestizo panpipe performance (2010); this is linked to a broader movement of the Latin American left for indigenous rights, accompanied by the elevation of traditional forms of music in leftist and nationalist movements. (see Turino 1993 on Peru) The *siku* (panpipe) had lowly associations for urban middle classes and as such remained outside of the cultural mainstream, yet has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years as indigenous people have gained a lever to power.

²⁵³ Trends towards a boycott of Israeli elections are heightened at critical moments, with 82% of Palestinians refusing to take part in 2001 as the government pursued a violent crackdown of the *Intifada*. Just 47% of Palestinians aged 18-24 voted in the 2015 election. (Abraham Fund 2015)

²⁵⁴ The cultural policies of Morales’ MAS (Movement to Socialism) have been the subject of academic critique, including claims of “reverse racism” and an “Andino-centrism” which is itself seen by Postero (2007) as a source of political violence. Such claims, in my view ignore the interventions of imperialist, and particularly US governments in Latin America, sponsoring xenophobic and authoritarian regimes. (Perkins 2006; Galeano 2009) Bigenho writes that, “Both Bolivian folklore musicians and leaders like Evo Morales have appealed to a global circulation of indigeneity—a multifaceted discourse, deployed within institutional practices and market-driven processes, that champions those who have lived in a position of marginality”. (2009)

social movements and for helping them achieve their goals.” (2010, 85)

Roy’s comments point to broader experience, bringing to mind the figures of black instrumentalists Hendrix and Miles Davis in the anti-racist and anti-war struggles of the US. (Gilroy 2010) As in the Bolivian example, social resistance has often amplified, rather than nullified, the voices of indigenous and radical instrumentalism.

Movements inside the green line have been linked dramatically to events in the Occupied Territories and resistance to wider Israeli incursions in Lebanon and the Middle East, with the winds of solidarity sometimes blowing in both directions. Examples include the spread of opposition to the Prawer Plan targeting Bedouin regions of the southern Naqab, eventually scrapped as an energetic wave protest spread across historic Palestine in 2013.²⁵⁵ The same year, the descendents of those expelled from the village of Iqrit sparked a protest campaign reminiscent of the Al-Hadaf project described by Massalha (2014). The village was “temporarily” evacuated in 1948 and villagers never allowed to return (Davis 2010, 225) but since 2013 has been a site of reclamation and of political mobilisation, with music and drama²⁵⁶ playing a central role in acts of mass disobedience. (Kane and Deger 2014) While youth resistance in the *dakhil* has not yet reached the levels of insurgency that have resulted in the questions of state power being pondered by Latin American leftists, movements of protest over the ethnic cleansing operations, or to reclaim sites of villages destroyed in the *Nakba* suggest a buildup disaffection with Israeli state policy that adds a new dimension to acts of solidarity with the plight of Palestinians living under Israeli fire.

In conditions different to those under which the Al-Hadaf project emerged in the 1980s, or to life under direct military rule prior to 1966, the more recent post-Oslo period has been characterised partly by the struggles of a section of ’48 Palestinian youth for space within and outside of Israeli scenes and institutions, spurred on by their denial of basic rights to enter nightclubs, or to put on their own concerts and parties. Karkabi writes that an alternative movement encompassing rave culture, electronica and other forms of locally and internationally-referential forms expression has formed a counterculture with political content, challenging “external and internal impositions of structural oppression and othering”. This has

²⁵⁵ It should be noted, however, that Israel continues its policy of “modernisation”/ethnic cleansing of the Naqab region, with plans currently underway to destroy the entire village of Umm al-Hiran, for example. (Nassar 2018)

²⁵⁶ 47Soul vocalist Wala’ Sbait was a notable participant.

been mostly confined to ‘mixed’ university cities such as Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, with Shafa’amr named with number of “village-like” cities with a “climate of control” seen as emanating from the Palestinian communities themselves. (Karkabi 2013)

How does Saied’s brand of *musiqā samita* (موسيقى صامتة), “silent music” as Arab instrumental genres are sometimes termed, relate to these developments and to the international movements described above? Speaking about his project with Akram Haddad, Saied expands upon the meaning of its main title:

“*W Ba ‘dein...* Like, ‘*w ba ‘dein ma’ kul...*’, until when are we going to put up with this shit?” - that’s what it means... In Arabic, when something happens over and over and you’re not happy with it, most people would go, ‘[tut] *w ba ‘dein?! Ya ‘ni* until when? *Khalas, w ba ‘dein?! That’s the project.*”

There must be some question of who understands the phrase used as a title for the project; unlike the live concerts or interviews, online recordings do not contain verbal or written introductions. My research suggests that the phrase “*w ba ‘dein?!’*” is understood by Palestinians in widespread locations.²⁵⁷ While vocal tone and circumstance are defining,²⁵⁸ in some contexts it was felt to mean, “so what?!”, “WTF?!”, or “stop doing that!” Applied towards Gaza, it was thought to mean, “we are fed up with this... it sucks... we need a change for the better.” Others agreed with the idea that the phrase can be a demand rather than a question: “say it louder and it becomes a threat!”

If “*W Ba ‘dein?!’*” is interpreted as “enough!”, Saied unknowingly evokes the sentiment of Nilo Soruco, a protest singer banned under the military regime in Bolivia in the 1970s. (Chetty 2012) While Soruco penned lyric-driven music, he also absorbed the influences of US and Celtic folk song and, while outside of the instrumental music renaissance observed above in some Latin American countries, was likewise concerned to make a connection to popular struggles against oppression, privatisation, or for a revolutionary alternative. I argue that there are certain parallels with Saied’s position in these movements, with a narrative emphasis on rights to land and heritage, alongside a musicianship that seeks both new forms of artistic expression, and

²⁵⁷ As part of this study I asked Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank, Britain and the UAE for their views on the phrase “*w ba ‘dein?!’*” This section draws on these informal discussions.

²⁵⁸ It is used quite generally as “and then” - “I ate breakfast and then I brushed my teeth.”

new spaces within which to transmit it. While the analysis of Karkabi raises questions on both how such space is to be found and the form of Palestinian musical transmission in the current “Israeli” context (2018), it seems clear that a historic trend towards politicised disengagement with the Zionist cultural apparatus will continue. Reem Talhami explains:

“It’s hard to be a citizen of this ‘Israel.’ Some people think they should use that and go and make money where they can earn it. You can find people who work in the media, in Israeli radio or television... I would consider that a losing of the way.... I would not like to normalise relations.”²⁵⁹

It would also appear that, in the resurgent forms of popular struggle taken up by Palestinians in the *dakhil*, the narrative of rejecting normalisation finds natural allies. Youth activists at Iqrit spoke of the need to reclaim a heritage in land that would enable them to “go back living, not just with death.” (Kane and Deger 2014) For Saied, “having an artistic spirit among Palestinian society is definitely *sumud* and perhaps even more than just the basic ability to simply stay and survive.”

As a question, “*W Ba‘dein?!’*” expresses Saied’s frustrations and urges other Palestinians to find a way out of the state of impasse hinted at in El-Ghadban and Strom’s depiction of the Palestinian music scene. (2013) Saied’s frustrations over the new highway built over Shefa’amr land; or at the poor drainage, urban facilities and general state of development of Palestinian towns in comparison to the all-Jewish settlements built over the destroyed landscapes of historic Palestine. The title expresses dissatisfaction with the status quo, and towards unequal patterns of “shit” social experience that recur “over and over”. But it also contains the notion of realisation that these conditions must change.

6.6 Saied in Britain

“I’m just starting, to be completely honest. And I really struggled with that here because people, and I’m not generalising, it might just be the people I came across... People here try to either keep art away from anything else because they think that anything

²⁵⁹ Interview in Jerusalem, August 2013.

else you put with art stains it. Or they would prefer not to take stands. Which is fair enough if they're not Palestinians, or they might not have enough information to take a stand or a side."

Saied's desire to reconnect with the audience back home was an ongoing theme of our discussions in London. While he engaged with local music making, including with a university Arabic music ensemble and his own composition work, he emphasised that was only here temporarily, "it would never be *moving* here". Coming in the first place conjured mixed feelings, knowing the history of British intervention in Palestine, but studying in London enabled Saied a moment to "breathe" and think about music. "I wanted to do my masters and I didn't want to do it in an Israeli institution."

Throughout this chapter, I have linked Saied's memories, reflections and performances to his position in Shefa'amr or the *dakhil*. Why focus on this and not his life in London? Through this research I made thematic and strategic decisions connected to this question, bound up with the structure and focus of this thesis as a whole. In interviews and informal discussions, Saied offered lots of reflections on life in Britain, hinting at a sense of isolation, homesickness and, at the same time, a level of opportunity for new musical experiences. Living in London also meant doing menial work as a means of survival. He'd arrived in October 2014 and admitted the following May that:

"the last few months there were really difficult and the way I managed to deal with them is to spend as much time as possible in nature, with friends and sometimes alone, just thinking how to create a plan."

Saied would highlight his age (26 at the time) and that he was really only at the beginning of a musical journey. It became clear that the "plan" ultimately meant considering how best to intervene in the Palestinian music scene. The discussion around naming, and use of regional phrases and idioms in language, pointed to a target audience back home.

The position of the '48 Palestinians within the national project often consists of an unwelcome sideshow, ignored by the PA (Massad 2010) and contested within studies of music which see Israeli supremacy as a permanent feature, which Palestinians have either come to terms with (McDonald 2013), or are accepted only on the basis of collaboration with Israelis. (Brinner

2009) Saied's stories of music making as a teen, his upbringing and journey to Palestinian nationalism, and his commitment to instrumental forms all throw a spanner in the works and raise questions about space and social movements in the Zionist state. I analyse his reflections on early experiences of land and music towards understanding the thought processes that accompanied his formative years.

Saied's channelling of jazz and other European influences, and his decision to study for two years in London, suggests that this search for space characterises his performance practice and approach to music. The parallels that I draw with the musics of Latin American resistance are by no means clear-cut, but multiple influences, narratives of land and stand for indigenous rights are all similarly present in the Saied's message. Moreover, the hunger for a grassroots audience among the community of the oppressed and independence from the structures of colonialism and globalisation are hallmarks of disparate social movements. (Roy 2010; Rosenthal and Flacks 2015) Reflecting on things from London, Saied plotted his return.

“[I want to] use the qualifications and powers that I gained here to build relationships back home with musicians from the West Bank, for instance, or from Gaza, other artists. I don't have any channels with the audience there... but I have a feeling that there is anticipation there. I hope I'm right but I need to know. Let's see.”

6.7 Conclusions: Saied's anticolonial transmission

I will conclude this chapter with some reflections on Saied Silbak's contribution to transmitting Palestinian and musical narratives, drawing out what I feel are the main points of this case study and hinting at the wider significance of his approach. One thing striking about carrying out this part of the research is that, although junior to the other musicians in this thesis by a measure of decades, Saied had a propensity to offer stories on a wide range of experiences in music and social life, mostly his own, but also those of older family members and friends. I have limited my analysis of his musical story to a single chapter in order to focus on his journey through and into music, clearly a shorter path than Reem or Raghda. Yet, like these singers, Saied's reflections on land and music covered a breadth of historical time and references that offered divergent lines of enquiry. In short, the perspective of a young '48 Palestinian musician with an alternative take on music and resistance is in many ways untold.

A dilapidated northern town with a Palestinian population, Shafa'amr was and is a location encompassing the anxieties, losses and lack of opportunities for the Israeli state's internal others. With a Muslim majority, Shafa'amr also houses large Christian and Druze²⁶⁰ populations. Its differences with Kuwait City and Gaza do not need listing but it is notable that Palestinian transmission in all three locations of upbringing bring in uneasy urban-rural relationships, evoking pre-*Nakba* Palestine and highlighting the position of its ancestors today. Researching the life of a Palestinian town in the *dakhil*, Massalha describes the creation of the Israeli state as a "rupture" in existing social, political and cultural life, resulting in a colonial *nomos* set up to serve the dominating interests of political Zionism. (2014, 165) In reclaiming the idea of being Palestinian, youth with Israeli citizenship therefore threaten a rupture in the colonial order.

Remembering picking olives on the outskirts of the city²⁶¹ and learning Fairuz around his aunt's piano, Saied's narrative suggests points of exploration that reference both the historic connections and new environments for transmission. Although Saied doesn't order his memories in the same way, I observe that these seemingly mundane childhood reminiscences looked differently to him after his teenage years. Meeting a political crowd, encouraging him to read and reassess his position, he came to see the normalising agenda of the music project at the Rabin settlement and, moreover, led him to recording his grandfather's *Nakba* story and presenting it to others. My arguments see Saied's conclusions on music and coexistence as part of the broader social movement of '48 Palestinians. Following Massalha, I connect these positions to the experience of Palestinians in the *dakhil*, towards finding space for an alternative where none appears to be available. Or, in other words, in a "context where the state is colonial, space is contested, and the citizenship it offers is corrupted and racialised." (2014, 26)

²⁶⁰ Present-day Druze are noted to have an ambivalent relationship with the Israeli state, with many serving in the IDF, but their role in Palestinian history is complex. While Robinson reports of the colonial Jewish Agency's attempts to court Druze notables, her suggestion that the community was largely cut off from the nationalist movement seems exaggerated (2013, 20); in the 1936-39 Arab revolt in Particular, Druze fighters from almost all villages joined the rebellion against British occupation and Zionism. In the post-1948 period, Druze protested against military conscription, notably led by men from Shafa'amr in a 1956 petition. (Aboultaif 2015) Modern day Druze politicians in the Israeli Knesset range from the pro-Zionist to Palestinian socialist; MK Said Nafaa was charged in 2011 for meeting with PFLP representatives in Syria. (Khouri 2011)

²⁶¹ While Israeli companies are keen to appropriate and market the produce of this colonised land, selling hummous, baba ghanoush and so on, historic references to a Palestinian heritage in olive harvesting face erasure. (Slymovics 1998, 175)

Embracing the land of historic Palestine therefore carries the seeds of action against the ongoing demolition and confiscation of this land, and itself an outcome of campaigning and movement.²⁶² McDonald points to one side of Palestinian youth experience in the *dakhil* (2013), but an embrace of hip-hop only tells part of a story that includes multiple approaches to music making, from rap, electro-dabke and reggae, tarab, pop and nationalist protest song, with many complex and layered references to rural and urban Palestine, past and present. Despite McDonald's protestations quoted above, attachments to land continue to resonate and fuse with social action to defend a material heritage. Replacing Zionist culture with a transmission of the oppressed thereby becomes the goal, acting as the antidote to the process which has acted to erase or delegitimise Palestinian expression. (Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury 2017, 402)

I see Saied's reaching back for his grandfather's stories, to Ibrahim Nasrallah and reflections on the land as connected to this social movement. A level of idealisation or exaltation of the land – of which Stephan Khoury's reported defence of his village indicates – is not unrelated to the well-documented depiction of peasant and fellah steadfastness in Palestinian narratives. (Swedenburg 2003, 1990; Khalili 2007; McDonald 2013) I see this as linked to traditions of heroic storytelling and as not necessarily backwards-looking; Saied saw Nasrallah's approach to history as an explicit counter to the cultural tendencies of present day imperialism. Saied's commitment to narration alongside music is a significant contributing factor to how his work may be seen, whether discussing Fairuz or his rocky route to music, the olive harvest, the underdevelopment of Shafa'amr, or his familiar story of 1948.

Does this narrative then sidetrack the music? For, without these spoken words, Saied's music is threatened with the kind of (mis)interpretation that clearly concerns him deeply. I have responded to such musings by emphasising notions of collective imagination and resistance, hemmed to the questions of an alternative to a life under colonial regime for '48 Palestinians. The chapter presented a discussion of what is represented by instrumental music in the Palestinian context, with its various forms connected simultaneously to radical tradition, folk history, new and continuing fashions for *tarab*, as well as to the instrumentalism of outside-funded ensembles and institutions. El-Ghadban and Strohm cannot view Palestinian music as

²⁶² Another potential flashpoint for the Palestinians of Shefa'amr is over housing, with frequent rejections by Israeli authorities for new home building for a growing city-dwelling population. (DAAR Decolonising Architecture Art Residency report, 2018)

“singly” resistance-focused (2013) but, I argue, the longstanding domination of what might be called the national grassroots music scene by many forms of resistance musics is unlikely to wane, and even more so in a rightwardly-shifting global context.

If the search for space and an audience leads Saied in towards radical forums for performance, his early social involvement in music was itself the catalyst for radicalising his view of the world. Palestine wasn’t “there” in the foreground of his childhood, he admits, but this would change as the project at the Rabin settlement – and his teenage friendships – drew him away from involvement in the liberal enterprise for coexistence, and towards a Palestinian nationalist consciousness. I have linked this process to a renaissance in ’48 Palestinian relationships to reclaiming lost villages and celebrating a pre-*Nakba* heritage. Interestingly, unlike Reem Kelani, Saied doesn’t depict his own Palestinian renaissance as coming directly from *za’atar w zeit*, city farming and Fairuz, but as being fuelled by musical experiences and encounters that pushed him to question Israeli dominance.

Was this a coming to terms with reality? The relative physical state of Shafa’amr paled in comparison to its neighbouring settlements and going to school in a tiny building “in a car park” must have raised questions in his mind. Beckles Willson draws on Baudrillard to see music coexistence projects in the West Bank as presenting a “simulation” of idealised and ideologically driven forms of cross-cultural collaboration. (Beckles Willson, 2013) What can be said about the “Israeli” context is that the pressure on Palestinians to conform and to accept their subjugated position acts in particularly powerful ways, simultaneously draconian and subtle.²⁶³ I link Saied’s thought process to the material drive behind the decisions of other Palestinians to embrace the national cause, the land, and to rebuild narratives of resistance and sumud towards transmitting an alternative vision of the future.

Saied’s concern to be understood led to a focus within this chapter on the meanings behind his approach. His vision of transmission is realised in performance through verbal utterances as well as through Saied’s performance and compositional work. Onstage and in titles he uses humour, a tactic that he sees as “getting to people” and provoking thought on the Palestinian situation. His assertion that his approach to instrumental music is also a form of resistance itself

²⁶³ Another consequence of Israeli expansionism, noted by Nur Masalha, concerns socio-economic gaps between internally-displaced Palestinians and those whose families stayed in their cities and villages after 1948. (2005)

carries a sense of provocation. Shohat's comments on the activities of colonised peoples towards "researching and recycling" pre-colonial cultural forms of expression (1992, 110-111) may chime with certain Palestinian musicians (and I don't see this implication negatively). But questions come to mind over whether Saied rejects this approach altogether – perhaps surprising given his commitment to a heritage of struggle. Conversely, I argued, that progressive, experimental approaches to musicality are characteristic of Palestinian experience. In other words, it is not the form that is regenerated, but a commitment to expanding forms of transmission.

Saied emphasises that his intervention in music is "just getting started" and, without a recorded album or a solidly regular schedule of concerts, his performance record still has something makeshift about it and, though drawing on the *tarab* tradition, shares something of a common basis with alternative music scenes across the Arab world. (Rooney 2013) I drew on the fresh perspective of Latin American resistance, a site of many forms of indigenous cultural manifestation, and the experiences referred to above in regards to Bolivia in particular show that instruments and non-musical forms can often carry great relevance and therefore form part of radical movements of opposition. Working outside of Israeli institutions, in a society where space is determined by the material constraints of a colonial Zionist regime, Saied's musical contribution suggests that instrumentalism can be a powerful form of transmission for Palestinian artists.

Part III

Songs of displacement in Gaza and Manchester

The case of Raghda

Chapter 7: Raghda's *Intifada*

“Last week I was talking with Awatif²⁶⁴ about that time and how it was. The music is very precious for us. Really important for us. I remember my brother had a cassette... if someone would touch it - it's not allowed! And if I think about the price of this cassette, its nothing. But I think the value of this cassette was not the money. It was for people like us who liked to sing from it. At that time, everything for me was as a dream. Something I can't touch in my hand. Maybe because of all this I began to like music more and more.”²⁶⁵

“Assaf lit a candle but we need light. We don't need candles, we need more. Even Assaf can't sing in Gaza. I see that he sings in Ramallah and feel very sad that he can't sing in Gaza. Why? People in Gaza don't deserve music or to be happy? The politicians in Gaza don't think we should be happy. How can I be optimistic to build something for music?”²⁶⁶

Our final case study consists of two chapters on Raghda, a single mother, Palestinian and refugee with papers, who now lives between Manchester and London and sings regularly at home or with friends and family. From a young age, she remembers having a strong connection to music and political song but, unlike Reem Kelani and Saied Silbak, Raghda is not currently pursuing a career in music. Growing up in the 1980s in a large family in the cramped Bureij refugee camp to parents expelled from villages near Yafa and Jerusalem in 1948, her stories tell of war and revolution, poverty and social strife in the Gaza Strip, the setting of this chapter. The second part of this study will look to her experiences at the hands of the British Home Office and an ongoing relationship with music and Palestine.

Chapters so far have looked at the locations of Kuwait, Shafa'amr and the British music industry as sites for the musical transmission of Palestinian narratives. As suggested in the thesis introduction reviewing thematic gaps in academic study, Gaza continues to face an

²⁶⁴ Raghda's younger sister Awatif lives in London.

²⁶⁵ Interview in Manchester, 29 April 2015.

²⁶⁶ Interview in Manchester, 29 May 2015.

imbalance of scholarly attention. While the Strip's borders are tightly controlled, movement in or out is no easy task for the researcher, let alone for Palestinians facing an Israeli-Egyptian blockade. But it is impossible to ignore Gaza's position as the front line of 30 years of struggle, the spark of the first *Intifada* in December 1987 and more recently the focus of massive Israeli bombing campaigns. If some writers have looked at the social changes and political implications of this period for women (Sabbagh 1998; Naguib 2009; Darraj 2014), charting the *Intifada* uprising (Swedenburg 2003), the Oslo accords and the rise of Hamas as a challenge to “secular” Fatah dominance (Pestani 2016), there has been next to nothing written on music making in Gaza, and little on its relevance to these historic developments for Palestinian women, men or children. Existing work on music and the *Intifada* is, I argue, limited in its scope and underplays the relevance of this politically rebellious genre for today.

Despite the complications of claiming Gaza as her “home”, spending her entire upbringing in Bureij refugee camp, Raghda says that “Gaza means my son... and many things”, a place of depth in its historical, social and emotional recollection.²⁶⁷ Born in 1976, she got into music in a serious way during her teens, in a politicised, communitarian environment at home. By the time of the Oslo accords – the “morning after”, to reference Said’s famous denunciation (1993) – she had become a young woman and was, in 1993-94, married, pregnant and divorced. Still a teenager, it would be another decade before she felt she had to leave. These were tumultuous years and it is significant that Raghda's stories contain so many musical anecdotes. But what do these memories help us understand in the transmission of Palestinian narratives? As Raghda sees Lebanese and Syrian musicians as part of this process, what can be added to the writings of McDonald (2013) and Massad (2003) on the other Arab musicians singing for the Palestinian cause?

If the early *Intifada* years meant the mass participation of women, as Sabbagh (1998) and others have argued, did the music of the *Intifada* open up any space for the participation of young girls? What were the barriers or platforms for singing? Or, put differently, did music serve to contain or postpone social progress for girls and young women, reflecting what has been seen as a retreat in women’s progress in the years that followed? (Jad 1998; Abu Ghazaleh 1998) Building on the work of Bilal on Armenia (2006) and citing literature on social memory in the Palestinian field, this chapter discusses the ability of song to be passed on and utilised in a

²⁶⁷ Interview in Manchester, 29 April 2015.

struggle for self-determination and national preservation. As Gaza was a both a place of refuge under occupation and a site of resistance, in what ways did musical forms contribute to or take on these influences? Continuing the discussion of cosmopolitanism in the previous case studies, and drawing on Turino, Burkhalter and Armbrust, I argue that the cassette tape solidarity offered by a group of Lebanese singers played a formative role in Raghda's Palestinian consciousness and shaped ideas on oral tradition and the place of music today. Finally, I revisit the question of Hamas and what some see as the "Islamicisation" of Gaza, discussing the implications for music making in the broader context of trends in the Middle East and towards the continuing Palestinian struggle against Zionist war and blockade. While Raghda's decision to leave Gaza was neither easy nor based on a single issue, her experiences shed new light on strategies of national survival, *sumud* and resistance.

7.1 Village dreams in urban Gaza

"My son has never seen my village, but for me it's my home. Sometimes I have a conflict within myself between Gaza and Al-Qubeiba. And when I talk with my friend – he's from the West Bank – he tries to say to me 'you're a Gazzawiya!' (Gazan). No, I'm not Gazzawiya, I'm from Al-Qubeiba. For me, I like Gaza, I feel it's my place, my country, but when people say Gazzawiya, no I'm not Gazzawiya, my village is Al-Qubeiba."

Raghda's early childhood was shaped by learning that the refugee camp in Gaza was not her family's original home and, by the time of the *Intifada*, had seen her paternal village for herself on an emotional family trip. This day out took place when she was a young girl in the mid-1980s. During the uprising itself, stories and songs about Al-Qubeiba and historic Palestine would be central to her own involvement as older relatives took to the streets in revolt. This section focuses on Raghda's ties to the land inhabited by her parents and grandparents, and is situated within a growing field of study in Palestine, the diaspora and in academia towards showing the bonds between exiles and the land of their heritage. Feldman (2006), Khalili (2007), Davis (2011) and Sirhan (2014) in particular have examined Palestinian connections to villages of origin, through political, linguistic and commemorative processes. Gaza is

present in many of the stories of dispersed Palestinians,²⁶⁸ and Raghda's relationship with Al-Qubeiba offers a wealth of detail on the social activities of second and third generation "Gazans", in particular showing the role of music in shaping Palestinian consciousness in the pre-*Intifada* years. Her recollections offer a window into this process.

"It was paradise really. A dream actually", Raghda says, half closing her eyes with these words. She emphasises the relative abundance of flora and fauna in the village compared to Gaza. As in a dream, the event came once and never happened again:

"I went to Al-Qubeiba. My dad and our relatives arranged a trip to our village. I think I was about seven... It was easy for us to move before the *Intifada*; it was not Israel, it was Palestine. At lunchtime my family started to sing and my dad also sang very old songs on the journey. I still like to remember that. It was a very nice time, really touching. My village, I'd heard a lot about it."

The journey²⁶⁹ was a story in itself: a small convoy of family cars, with Raghda's father Loutfi, leading the way and playing the role of the narrator. In her telling of the story, the village is mirage-like, holy, and it is clear that Loutfi had already initiated the children into viewing the land he left in 1948, at the age of five, as their own. Here was his chance to narrate with moving pictures.

"We don't know what happened in 1948. My grandfather heard what happened in the other villages, the killing, abuse of women... They left thinking they would return after one week or one month"

"I don't know how my dad could go back to the village with another people [living there] and see how... We knocked on the doors and a Jewish lady opened it. It was like you entered the hall part but there was another door and we couldn't go inside the house. She gave us tea. My uncle was talking to her in Hebrew and she was nice. She covered her hair, I think she was from Iraq, an Arab Jew. I still remember what he said, "*barde shilano*", I think it means, this is our

²⁶⁸ Unlike the villages and towns to the north and east, the area now labelled as Gaza was not ethnically cleansed in 1948 but many Gazans, like Raghda's mother, hail from villages local to the region, including those destroyed to make way for Tel Aviv. Palestinian writer and critic Muhammad Batrawi is originally from the destroyed village of Isdud, barely 30 kilometres from Gaza. (Tamari 2008)

²⁶⁹ Such brief returns were possible in the years following the Israeli annexation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967, with the 'borders' of both more porous until the late 1980s. (Feldman 2006)

house. I don't know how my dad and the relatives could look at their house and see it in someone else's hands - not for them. And smell the oranges and lemons.”

The bittersweetness that Raghda describes is characteristic of her other remembrance-based anecdotes and Palestine's depiction through fruit shares common traits with Reem Kelani, Saied Silbak and a host of Palestinian literary figures. Her sensory awareness appears heightened in the trip to Al-Qubeiba, as she recalls her family sitting down to lunch with slices of watermelon, surrounded by olives, pomegranates and oranges.

A certain romanticisation of pre-*Nakba* life is noted as a strong theme in discussions of Palestinian social memory, with nostalgic visions of rural life, social cohesion or traditional heritage formed in contexts of occupation and expulsion. (Khalili 2007; Jayyusi 2005; Swedenburg 1990) Like Reem Kelani, Raghda refers in vivid language to the sensory experiences of food in her visit to historic Palestine, musing on her family's 1948 ordeals in connection to her journey as a child along with relatives who had left the land. Raghda's very notions of who she is and where she is from are expressed through her accent, her tastes in music and TV,²⁷⁰ and in the teachings she offers to her younger family members.²⁷¹ Referencing Geary's notion that all memory is “*for something*”, carrying political purpose and meaning, Feldman views Gazan narratives of home as a “refrain”, persisting in the face of ongoing political defeat: “Displacement, like home, is a process marked by repetition. It accrues in memory, shaping people's recollections of times before and of experiences since.” (Feldman 2006)

With phrases often used by other displaced Palestinians, Raghda describes the village as a “paradise” or “dream” (Slymovics 1998, 121; Sayigh 2007, 10), building a narrative of home that emphasises its endurance into the present day. Praising the fruits and natural qualities of the land, its fertility and past prosperity, are themes indistinct to the Palestinian experience and are prominent in nostalgic defendings of rural pasts against a range of phenomena in the capitalist era. (Williams 1975) To such observations it should be recognised that in the context the Gaza of Raghda's youth, the cramming together of a cross-section of society in conditions

²⁷⁰ Raghda says she watches the Syrian-produced series *Al-Taghriba Al-Falastiniya* (“The Palestinian Exile”), which depicts villages including Al-Qubeiba in the form of a TV drama set in pre-*Nakba* times.

²⁷¹ According to another Palestinian friend who grew up in Gaza, there is maternal pressure on new generations to “not forget” where their family came from, and the label *Gazzawi-Haifawi* is more acceptable than accepting the more permanent-sounding *Gazzawi* label.

characterised by enduring humanitarian crisis, questions of food production and agriculture remained flashpoints of struggle.²⁷² Visions of abundance under the peasant conditions of the past, whether real or idealised, have therefore helped to fuel both survival and a rejection of a colonial status quo. For Feldman, while the objects of memory are often no longer “objects of use” (such as the keys to pre-1948 homes), Gaza-based Palestinians are “both displaced and rooted”, and “memory through refrain” has helped to prevent Palestinian community and social life from being destroyed completely. The processes shaping Raghda’s valorisation of Al-Qubeiba, her father’s narrative of the land, and her own quest to transmit its existence as the alternative to a permanent exile in Gaza, are therefore deeply connected to the lived experiences of generations of residents in Gaza’s refugee camps.²⁷³ For Raghda, music was part of the “dream” of returning.

The singing had started in the car and Raghda says that the originally Lebanese *Bektub Ismik Ya Biladi* (“I write your name, my country”) and Palestinian rebel song ‘*Al-Raba’iyyeh*, were the most memorable parts of the setlist – to this day they remind her of mum and dad (the next sections in this chapter will look more closely at these songs). It is notable at this stage that such nationalist anthems were part of the soundtrack to a journey in pre-*Nakba* history and belonging. Other depictions of return have appeared as moments of tragedy and anger: Ghada Karmi’s visit to her West Jerusalem home ends in the refusal of its Israeli inhabitants to let her enter²⁷⁴; in Kanafani’s 1969 novel *Returning to Haifa*, a couple go back and see that their son has been raised a Zionist army recruit, eventually putting faith in their other son, a *fedayyi* guerrilla. (2000) If Raghda can ponder on what it would have felt like for her father to return,

²⁷² The cultivation of the land was cooperativised under the communal atmosphere of the *Intifada* as women’s groups in particular distributed jams, pickles and other food items. Control over food resources was also part of the struggle and coincided with Palestinian boycotts of Israeli-sold produce. (Jad 1990, 134)

²⁷³ Abu-Sitta reflects on the immediate impact on Palestinian societal relations in the aftermath of the *Nakba*:

“The tents could be differentiated in people’s minds by the nostalgic character, represented in so many ways, of the home village they had left behind. Here or there, a cluster of houses became the refuge of people from Burayr, al-Jiyya, or Barbara. They were uprooted people, robbed of their land, but not of their identity and least of all their familial cohesion. Groups maintained their social structures, complete with the village mukhtar and sub-mukhtars (heads of hamulas, extended families). The mukhtars maintained their influence, stamped papers, solved disputes, and represented the village before the authorities.” (2016, 95)

²⁷⁴ At her childhood home in Katamon, West Jerusalem, Karmi is filmed walking with trepidation up the steps to the front door. “It would have been nice really for us to go into the house and show it on the inside but the current Israeli ‘owner’ - should I call him an owner? - didn’t give his permission.” (Brunner 2011) Shut out from her house Karmi looks at the garden from the balcony-cum-porch that reaches out over it. “This tree! My god! The same lemon tree...”. Still flourishing in on the grounds of the home that she had left as an eight-year old in 1948. She strokes its branches but doesn’t pick one of its many ripe fruits among the clusters of green and yellow.

she thinks the village must have been a musical inspiration for him: “maybe it’s because of that environment in his village, lots of trees, a very romantic place, a simple life... I think it’s because of that he likes music, likes to sing.” Moments of sadness creep in as Raghda wonders aloud how her father coped with visiting the village he had left as a child and she reflects on whether it was the music and the presence of Raghda and the other children that lifted Loutfi’s spirits.

Raghda’s stories of early childhood and, as shall be seen, her teenage years point to the importance placed on oral memory by her parents and she brings memory of Al-Qubeiba and her maternal village of Beit Tima into conversation as an adult. Notably she names herself as “from there” rather than identifying Gaza as her place of origin. Acts of naming are prominent features in the narratives of Palestinian exiles,²⁷⁵ where in Lebanon refugees name sections of their camps after villages in historic Palestine, or internal refugees name areas of Galilee after Sabra and Shatila following Israeli attack. (Slymovics 1998) Khalili argues that such commemorative acts implicitly “contain a story” and points out that memory attached to the *Nakba* has already been detailed. (2007, 6) Davis discusses the research being done by Palestinian exiles in the form of village books, gathering materials on the geographies of ongoing dispossession. (2010; see also Chapter 5 on Shefa’amr) Some see this process as something of a race to document the memories of *Nakba* survivors or, put differently by Fatma Kassem, seeing “memory as a threat” to Zionism. (2011, 7) As Kassem writes, we must question whether processes of “past” can be so neatly separated with all that has come after, pointing to a motivation for new generations in documenting experiences of Palestinian displacement.²⁷⁶

Receiving transmission of her parents’ narratives of separation from their birthplaces was, I argue, an important part of the context through which Raghda would see the *Intifada* years. But, outside of this one-off visit to the village, how did being “from” Al-Qubeiba manifest itself for her in Gaza? A clue to such questions may come with her insistence on being “not Gazzawiya”. This defiant position seems continuant with her description of two aunts who

²⁷⁵ On the flip-side, Massad writes, Israel claims “naming power” in its process of colonisation of Palestinian land, extending to the everyday acts of naming where Zionist settlers take on names referencing Middle East geography and land. (2000, 38)

²⁷⁶ In *The Last Earth*, Ramzy Baroud captures the horrors of recent Palestinian and Syrian displacement and with it the inhospitable socio-political climates of Europe in dealing with the “refugee crisis”. (2018)

“still wear our traditional dress, the Al-Qubeiba dress”²⁷⁷; there is an obstinacy to the way these reverent ladies come across in Raghda’s tone of conversation. Raghda explains that her workmates in Gaza community projects used to retort that her own *fellahi* (peasant) accent was unladylike and impolite, particularly in its use of a hard “g” sound rather than a soft “’ah” used in many local Palestinian dialects.²⁷⁸ Depending on regional idioms, there are also differences in linguistic variations between male and female speakers, a phenomenon common throughout the Arab world. (Al-Wer, 2014) Raghda says an instance sticks in her mind involving the word *baqara* (بقرة), or cow, which her family pronounce as *bagara*, regardless of the speaker’s gender:

“In the Gaza and Yaffa accents they say *ba’ara*. For ladies, its considered nicer to say *ba’ara*, not *bagara*. I said to [a colleague], I can't change my accent or my personality. It's who I am. Whether people admire me or like me, it's me. So dialect is very important for me. I can't change my accent.”

Khalili notes that “Over several generations, due to chosen forced assimilation, many in Lebanon lost their Palestinian accents.” (2007) Nevertheless, she acknowledges a level of linguistic steadfastness among Palestinian refugees, “who did actually say that they could recall/emulate their old accents!”²⁷⁹ While not focusing on Gaza in her research on colloquial folk stories, Sirhan observes that “due to the geographical isolation which characterises the lives of Palestinians in Palestine, dialects spoken in Gaza and the West Bank have experienced considerably less contact with other dialects than those outside Palestine, which in turn has led to their greater linguistic conservatism.” (2014, 88) There are certainly generational changes²⁸⁰ which point to some linguistic traditions being assimilated by southern Palestinian *Gazzawi*

²⁷⁷ During the course of these interviews both aunts sadly passed away. The last, Seriyya, died in the Hayy al Nasr area of Gaza in March 2016. Unfortunately, says Raghda, the passing down of idiomatic local traditions in clothing or embroidery appears to have come to something of a stop with her aunts' generation. Raghda herself is, of course, part of this process, the next generation who have less direct contact with the traditional ways of dressing in historic Palestine.

²⁷⁸ Palestinians often wear accents as badges and make jokes of the lilting elongations of Khalili (Hebronite) accents, or other regional variations.

²⁷⁹ Online conversation with the author, June 2016

²⁸⁰ The maternal grandparents of *oud* player Reem Anbar still spoke in the urban Haifa accent of their pre-*Nakba* years but their daughter Olfat has taken on aspects of Saudi and Libyan dialects, having married early in Riyadh and living for a time in Tripoli. Three generations on from the *Nakba*, however, Reem says that she herself does not have a *Gazzawi* accent: “I speak like people from Haifa”. Translator and English teacher Duaa Ahmed likewise uses the hard “g” of her village heritage in Barbara and describes the language of older family members as “*fellahin*”. Another London-based, Gaza-born friend Rami says the generational differences are harder to make out and identifies differences in Gaza between those from families expelled from nearby villages and those from Jaffa, Lydda or Naqab regions. (Conversations with the author, February 2018)

Arabic, yet Raghda's linguistic connection to Al-Qubeiba raises questions on the balance between the conscious and commonplace acquisition of language, and on its role in preserving ties to historic Palestine. While a detailed analysis of such issues is outside of the scope of this thesis, a mutual friend, also from Gaza, hints at an answer: "Raghda and [her sister] Awatif don't talk like most of the people from Bureij", probably because, "originally, her family are *fellahi*."²⁸¹ If Raghda offers a strong defence of why she holds onto her Al-Qubeiba accent, its use by her and other family members may actually be more casual, pointing to the relative isolation of Gaza and linguistic connotations hinted at by Sirhan.

Linked to reactions to her *fellahi* turns of phrase, Raghda sympathises with *nawar* "gypsy" people in Gaza, treated "unfairly" and "as though they are impolite" because of their social habits and love of music; Raghda reports that weddings before the Intifada had *nawar* bands and dancing girls.²⁸² Her own insistence that she will stick to "who I am" in the face of a certain snobbishness towards *fellahi* accents from urban Gazans – and conservative attitudes to music – chime with what she sees as the rebelliousness of the *nawar* and the steadfastness of her aunts.

What do these memories help us understand in the transmission of Palestinian narratives? Reflecting on Mahmoud Darwish's statement on the 50th anniversary of the *Nakba*,²⁸³ Davis argues that,

"This way of thinking, in terms of a land-based identification category, is in opposite to the ethnic and religious identification that defines Israeli identity as a Jewish state for a group of people identified as Jews (although it does give citizenship to non-Jews). Palestinians have rooted their sense of nationalism in a discourse that emphasizes the connection between people and the land, a territory-based sense of identification..." (2010, 200)

²⁸¹ Conversation in Manchester, September 2018.

²⁸² Reviewing the memoirs of Wasif Jawhariyya, Elias Sahhab picks out a "group of professional female artists who were called *jankiyyas/jannaki*, who became famous during the early part of the twentieth century practicing an art that combined dancing with singing." (2015, 59) Kurkela links traditional Balkan fascination with Romani dancing girls with the "modern equivalent" of bling-filled modern pop videos in Bulgaria. (Buchanan 2007, 167)

²⁸³ In The Palestinian People's Appeal on the 50th Anniversary of the *Nakba*, read at the end of the protest march, Darwish evokes the "sacred land" and a half century of the "perpetual night of occupation and dispersion." He concludes that, "Born in Palestine, no other land gave us birth. No other can claim our future. Nor can Jerusalem be replaced as our capital or extracted from our land and our being: It is the home of our souls and the soul of our homeland, forever." (Darwish 1998)

While Raghda's emphasis on her paternal village rather than her mother's village of Beit Tima may raise further questions,²⁸⁴ I suggest that Davis' description of a rootedness to the land shapes experience. It is also true that Al-Qubeiba is still standing - Raghda recalls visiting Beit Tima too and talks romantically about the rural land and cotton growth, but there were no houses left to visit.²⁸⁵ It may be that this reality was acknowledged in Raghda's emphasis. The social memory to which Raghda was exposed in her childhood helped to shape her pre-*Intifada* consciousness of land and being Palestinian. If aspects of language-use for the Gaza exiles was referential to places lost, what did it say that many of the songs Raghda remembers were foreign imports? The following two sections look at the roles played by regional and Palestinian musicians in transmitting revolutionary nationalism during the *Intifada*, beginning with Raghda's reminiscences of Lebanese and Syrian singers.

7.2 Arab idols and the *Intifada*

Appearing on TV with backcombed 1980s hairdo, shoulderpads and, frankly, huge earrings, a still teenage Julia Boutros relaunched her musical career with an impassioned appeal for solidarity with Palestinian and Lebanese resisters to renewed Zionist incursions. Released in 1985, *Ghabit Shams il-Haqq* ("Down goes the sun of justice") later became an anthem of the *Intifada* and, along with her 1987 recording *Wein al-Malayeen?* ("Where are the millions?"), brought Julia into a group of Lebanese and Syrian musicians dedicating their work to the Palestinian and Arab revolutionary struggles. In Palestine, they immediately became celebrities

²⁸⁴ I asked several other "Gazzawi" friends, both inside and outside of Palestine, about their villages of origin. Duaa, a 20-something year old English teacher in Gaza City, has familial origins in Barbara (father's village) and Al Sawafir (mother's village), both in the northern Gaza district now part of Israel and both forcibly depopulated by Zionist military invasions during the *Nakba*. Asked the question, "where are your family from originally?" Duaa gave Barbara as her family village and compared the process to naming - "my surname is my dad's name, not my mum's, does that make sense?" Mohammad, a similarly aged man living in Gaza's Khan Younis refugee camp, has mixed Palestinian-Egyptian heritage and has an Egyptian mother, but says that he recognises Yafa as his family's historic homeland. Some others – and particularly, it seems, those Palestinian exiles who have not lived in Gaza – answer more broadly: "I am from Palestine" or "I don't like to say I'm *Gazzawi* or *Duffawi* [a West Banker], because these labels divide us."

²⁸⁵ In her own lifetime in Palestine, while Al-Qubeiba was visitable by Palestinians in the 70s and part of the 80s, still populated by Palestinians despite being under direct Israeli occupation since 1967, Beit Tima had long been reduced to rubble and ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian inhabitants during the *Nakba*. A diary entry on 1 June 1948 by David Ben Gurion, the Polish future Israeli Prime Minister and then leader of the terrorist Haganah, names Beit Tima and three other villages as having houses blown up by his forces and complains on other pages about the shortage of TNT for other destructive operations by Zionist militias under Plan Dalet. (Pappé 2006, 147) The Palestine Remembered project records that the entire village was depopulated of its 1,230 after Zionist attacks between 18-19 October 1948; UNRWA records 6,732 Palestinian refugees with origins in Beit Tima in its 1997 collection.

and cassettes were hastily bought and sold following the 8 December 1987 outbreak of *Intifada*. Radgha reports thinking these musicians and public figures were actually Palestinian and, like others, views them today as part of the nation, as honorary Palestinians. In this brief section, I chart the musical and wider significance of this trend, challenging existing definitions and reassessing the role of regional singers in the narratives of the *Intifada*.

Looking back, Raghda reflects on the music she was exposed to early in the *Intifada*:

“It wasn't Palestinian actually. Marcel Khalife, Julia Boutros, Umm Kulthum... People who were singing about their countries. And Samih Shuhqeir, a Syrian. And at the time we thought those people had Palestinian roots, because they were singing to Palestine as their country.”

“Marcel Khalife means Palestine, family, murder, detainees, my brothers, our family time. Mohammed, my older brother loves Marcel and sings his songs, so do my sisters, Muayyad, Awatif, Iman... we know his songs so Marcel Khalife means lots of things.”

To this list she adds Ahmad Qaabour, also from Lebanon, and Syrian singer Mayada El-Hennawy. Certain artists and songs remind her of the rough times in Gaza. While Raghda says there were no martyrs in the family, “everybody was thinking about revolution”, in a tense situation where her brothers were involved on the ground with the Marxist PFLP and while the family members of friends and neighbours faced death, injury or detention at the hands of the occupation.

Further sections in this chapter look at the involvement of young women and girls and Raghda sees music from Lebanon and Syria as central to her own experience of the *Intifada* years. In his study on Arab nationalism, Massad traces the history of song in the Palestinian issue, and with it its impact on Palestinian and Arab social memory, arguing that the post-1948 works of Najah Salam,²⁸⁶ Farid al-Atrash, Mohammed Abdel Wahhab and Umm Kulthum represented a:

“critique and intervention that has rendered the popular internal to the political, and not a manifestation external to it. The popular nationalist song is therefore not epiphenomenal or

²⁸⁶ Najah Salam was a Lebanese-Egyptian singer and actress. Among her most famous songs is *Ya Reem* (“Oh, Reem”).

subservient to the political, but is generative of political sentiment in many domains.” (Massad 2005, 177)

Related points are made by Turino, critiquing Appadurai’s (1990) view of cosmopolitan cultural flows competing with or superseding national culture, and arguing instead that “the nation” as expressed in Zimbabwean art and identity is forged through a “cosmopolitan-indigenous syncretism”. (2000, 354) While I am not suggesting that the works of the artists mentioned is musically “indigenous” to Palestine, Raghda’s experiences in the *Intifada* suggest that the utilisation of songs, genres and regional musicians were not easily separable. While McDonald draws a clear line between, on the one hand, *Wein al-Malayeen?*’s “stock lexicon” or “nationalist sign clusters”, “bereft of any particular “Arab” or “Palestinian” associations”, and by contrast Abu Arab’s “powerful narrative”, moving away from “cheap” revolutionary music with *Sabra wa Shatila* (2013, 101), such binaries bear little relation to listening habits. Writing on Egypt, Jennifer Peterson observes that street music, wedding singers and cassette culture were extremely difficult to separate in the public socialising of friends and families. (2008) In Gaza, *Intifada* listening perhaps even more closely brought Palestinian and Shami political song, tradition(alised) folk and wedding music into the orbit of social experience. But to what extent did the *Intifada*-era works of Julia Boutros, Marcel Darwish and other musicians mentioned by Raghda contribute to political sentiment in Gaza? And what is represented through the music itself?

Remembering her daytrip to Al-Qubeiba, the first song she mentioned was *Bektub Ismik Ya Biladi*, composed by musician and lyricist Elie Shwery during his time away from Lebanon in 1973,²⁸⁷ and made a hit by Lebanese singer Joseph Azhar. Beginning with rigid solo snare drum at about 138bpm (a Quick March in military language), a European sounding opening is suddenly Arabised by percussive patterns on the *riq* and *tabla*, resembling the syncopated *wazn*

²⁸⁷ The year saw a second military defeat of Arab states in six years as forces led by Egypt and Syria challenged Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and Sinai in the *harb tishreen* (the “October War” or Yom Kippur War). While Lebanon, seen as the “least warlike of countries”, was not involved significantly, the period was marked by increasing Israeli threats of attack on Lebanese soil if Lebanon did not act to quell Palestinian guerrilla operations in the south. (Hirst 2003, 379) Pro-Palestinian Arab nationalist and left-leaning musicians were angered by their nations’ humiliation at the hands of Zionist forces and expressed their political feelings through music and acts of solidarity. Umm Kulthum was said to be particularly moved by recent events and made large donations to the Palestinian resistance organisations. (al-Naqash 2000, 103; al-Mahallawi 1992, 78-79; Lohman 2011, 182) In Lebanon, Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers sung for “the waiting people” (“al nas al-naatereen”) of Jerusalem. If Nasserite pan-Arabism had reached its watershed, the rise of the PLO in the Palestinian revolution and continuing sentiments of anti-colonialist nationalism across the Arab world gave rise to new waves of protest music and patriotic song.

darj rhythmic pattern. The difficulty in pinning *Bektub Ismik* down musically, aside from the highly symbolic *yarghoul*, native to the Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria) region, suggests something deliberate: its universalism as a loving dedication to an unnamed nation. Lyrically, the song doesn't speak to a particular country. The nation evoked in imagery of pens and paper is unnamed but connects with a more widely shared theme.²⁸⁸ In *maqam rast*, reverbed strings (it was the 70s) punctuate and a large group of male singers herald the “la, la la la la la” refrain in unison with the *yarghoul*. Azhar's voice is booming, not dissimilar to a European tenor in its vibrato on sustained notes (“bilaaaadi”) in a simple but powerful vocal performance. He is responded to by his army of backing singers at various points in the song with repetitions of the “bektub ismik” chorus after his verses of solo vocals, followed by *yarghoul* and strings. While the verses differ in their melodic content, this is the format throughout. The chorus final rendition is performed by Azhar alone with backing instruments before *yarghoul*, choir “la la la”s and an instrumental fade-out.

Remembering *Bektub Ismik*, Raghda smiles uncontrollably and claps her hands, launching into the opening chorus, casting light on her later comments on Al-Qubeiba being a tough place for her father to visit. Raghda says she was unaware of Azhar and learned the song at the family home in Bureij camp, sat together watching a tiny black and white TV. To her, its original singer was a Syrian comedian and actor:

“Duraid Lahaam (دريد لحام) performed it in a play called *Kaasak ya-Watan* (“cheers to the country”)... The Israelis occupied the Golan and South Lebanon, the Sheba’a areas, so all the Sham countries are with Palestine. We liked that people were talking about the things happening in their own countries, as well as about Palestine, about the revolution. At that time, we were all refugees with no power. We liked that there was sympathy for us. We didn’t have a voice.”²⁸⁹

Lahaam's performance carried strong elements of satire which Raghda interprets as a protest against Hafez al-Assad. “People were fighting for their country in their own way.” Other, younger Palestinians also assume that Lahaam is the singer and that the song originates in

²⁸⁸ A Fairuz song, *Bektub Ismak Ya Habibi* (بكتب اسمك يا حبيبي - “I write your name my dear”), is different in style and content. Imagery attached to the act of writing is a common thread among some Palestinian literary figures including, famously, “Write down - I am an Arab” by Mahmoud Darwish, but others including “Poetry” by Khairi Mansour, or “The Hands Again” by Ahmad Dahbour (Jayyusi 1994). The icons contained in *Bektub Ismik Ya Biladi*, of sun, sea, of swords and holidays, are common national themes in 20th Century Arab literature. Invocations of love connect many other diverse examples and are clearly emphasised in both *Bektub Ismik Ya Biladi* and *Bektub Ismak Ya Habibi*.

²⁸⁹ Interview in Manchester, 10 June 2015.

Syria.²⁹⁰ But what was its general relevance to Palestinians in this period, and in particular to Raghda's family before the *Intifada*? *Bektub Ismik* writes from a singular first person, in a message to their country, a pledge of allegiance to its intrinsic beauty and love. In its visual evocations the song conjures the land, home, greenery and bridges, three of which Raghda refers to directly in her descriptions of the trip. While she doesn't mention crossing a bridge to arrive at the village, bridges are thematic to the Palestinian narrative - as included in the ruins of demolished *Nakba* villages such as Lifta, West Jerusalem (Bieler 2014); the Allenby bridge link between the West Bank and Jordan, tightly controlled by Israeli and Jordanian forces; or in songs depicting the "bridge of return" ("*Jisr al-ʿAwda*" - Fairuz/Rahbani Brothers); later, we will see, Raghda described music as "like a bridge" to being involved in the *Intifada*. Shwery places the homeland "above the highest bridge, and the knights that enter it, and the swords that raise high". In the context of Al-Qubeiba, evacuated in 1948 by Zionist "knights", the lyrics elevate the land above its conquerers and their weapons. Despite the obvious military references of its musical arrangement in the case of Joseph Azhar, *Bektub Ismik*'s militancy is understated, exalting the vitality of the homeland above the hostile threats towards it.²⁹¹

When talking about the Lebanese and Syrian singers of the 70s and 80s, Raghda calls Julia [Boutros] and Marcel [Khalife] by their first names, as though they were cousins or comrades, and similarly describes Ahmad Qaabour in personal terms. To what extent did their *Intifada*-era works contribute to Raghda's consciousness in Gaza? And what is represented through the music itself? If poet Mahmoud Darwish had seen Fairuz and the Rahbani brothers as having mastered Arab song for the Palestinians and other nations, this new generation of musicians were arguably even closer to the issue. Songs like Marcel's 1989 *Nashid al-Intifada* ("Anthem of the *Intifada*") and Qaabour's *Unadikum* (see McDonald 2013) allowed their singers to ride the crest of the uprising and cement their place in the Palestinian national imagination, with lasting effect. *Ghabit Shams il-Haqq*, a song cited by Raghda as remaining part of her listening

²⁹⁰ Conversations with the author, December 2017. Some similarly aged Syrian contacts didn't know the song.

²⁹¹ Syrians in particular have taken it on as their own: more recently Farah Youssef sang *bektub ismik* in the final of Arab Idol 2013 (she came a close second to Assaf and launched her career in singing). Her performance of *Bektub Ismik* appeared to temporarily unite warring forces in Syria behind something, although Syrian opposition supporters were apparently reluctant to support her for sectarian reasons (she is Alawi). One fan in Damascus reported, "Anti-Assad fans of Arab Idol were supporting Abdul Karim more than Farah because he is Sunni, but after he was knocked out then all Syrians were unified on Farah Youssef." (Sands 2013) There are, of course many versions by more recent Lebanese singers. Not that the song has a solely *Shami* appeal. During the Tunisian revolt against the rule of Ben Ali in 2010-11 it was taken up as an anthem and performances included Nawal Ghachem at a televised concert for its first anniversary in 2012. There are other Youtube videos on personal accounts collaging images of Palestinian resistance with *Bektub Ismik ya Biladi* as their soundtrack.

in adult life (discussed in the next chapter), originally spoke to the occupied and risen populace of southern Lebanon, but its lyrics were obvious in their relevance to the Palestinians in Gaza, southern Palestine:

Oh south, they have all sold you speeches
Justice is crucified, peace is bleeding

كلهم يا جنوب باعك الكلام
والعدل مصلوب عم ينزف السلام

Other lines reference roads being closed off and demand the right to remain in the land of the nation. In live performance, Julia would introduce the song by its hook, “we refuse to die” (“نرفض نحن نموت”) and exhort audiences to join her in one voice.²⁹² This simultaneously individual and mass protest extends to the promo video, where Julia stands alone throughout, as though signalling the personal stand she is taking. Perhaps it was this depiction of collective struggle and visions of a young woman standing at the heart of it that struck such a chord with Raghda. Later in *Hijar al-Mensiyeen* (“Stones of the Forgotten”), Julia would speak more directly to the Palestinians and the song was taken up as an anthem of the Second *Intifada* after 2000.²⁹³ Musically, this era in her career was hardly light years away from the stripped-back, guerrilla recordings of the *Intifada*’s Palestinian musicians, discussed in the next section.

While the production values of *Wein al-Malayeen?* showed a higher level of studio and production access, its simple melody and repetitive *maqam* treatment echoed the approach of grassroots, activist singers, linking folk song to political demands.²⁹⁴ Its arrangement is polished and professional but makes limited use of strings compared to many other Arab hits and is characterised by its driving percussion. I argue that these elements place Julia’s early work as part of the contemporary Lebanese avant-garde, “popular” but militant, *thawri* (revolutionary) yet inclusive of definite “European” musical influences, walking that tightrope

²⁹² See her spoken introduction on the *Haflat Sour* (“Tyre Concert”) recording. (Boutros 1991)

²⁹³ It was performed, for example, at the 2001 Jerash festival in Jordan by the *Firqa Koral al-Arabi*, met with audience cheers and whistles throughout. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5pUFMm5SeY> Accessed 3 April 2018)

²⁹⁴ The 1988 record *Music of the Intifada*, a collection of revolutionary anthems performed by Palestinian artists during the *Intifada*, is melodically comparable to some of the Julia Boutros songs described in the sense that they are based on simple, repetitive figures rather than the more complex *maqam* vocabulary of *tarab*. Its production, however, is much more rough and ready.

navigated in many areas of Lebanese social life.²⁹⁵ If other prominent representatives of this trend looked to irony and theatrical forms (Ziad Rahbani, Duraid Lahaam) she sings in simple terms, putting out a manifesto for solidarity. In the video to *Wein al-Malayeen*, standing between two other female singers, Julia sings “we are the revolution”, spliced with footage of Zionist military attacks and Palestinian resistance. The studio is juxtaposed with the streets.

Building on the argument I made in Chapter 3, that the relationship of the Rahbani brothers and Fairuz to Kuwait was tied to the fortunes of the Palestinian exiles, I want to reflect for a moment on what the Palestinian issue meant for Julia Boutros, Ahmad Qaabour, Marcel Khalife or Duraid Lahaam. In Rosemary Sayigh’s work on Palestinian peasants in the *ghorba*, one refugee woman remarks incisively on the position of leading Arab politicians: “Anyone who wants to become a *mukhtar* makes a speech about Palestine!” (2007, 147) Everyone from Saddam Hussein to the Saudi monarchy has claimed at one point or another to stand in solidarity with the cause. Does the attachment of Arab celebrity singers to the Palestine then also signify a form of opportunism, or a tactic to build careers and sell records, equivalent to bourgeois politicians’ attempts to win votes? McDonald’s scathing review of Julia Boutros suggests this cynicism, rather than a genuine attempt at solidarity, while Elliot Colla sees the solidarity of contemporary Egyptian musicians as presenting a “myth... that Egyptians and Palestinians are naturally unified and essentially defiant”. (2005, 347) Much more helpful, I argue, is Kay Dickinson’s description of the pro-Palestine content in the works of “avant-garde” artists Halim el-Dabh and Ziad Rahbani:

“The extent to which this internationalism might succeed as a politics of equality lies at the mercy of unrelenting colonial-capitalist continuities. That very same cosmopolitanism that spreads experimental tenets around the world owes its existence to channels of exploitation that have exposed some to geographical stasis, some to violent dispersal, and others to the privilege of international travel, often for expensive educations overseas. Within the Arab avant-garde, most fall into the latter category and, with that, comes a multilingualism that can be both enabling and protective.” (2013, 28)

²⁹⁵ Hirst looks at the political implications of the military interventions of Israel, but also on French colonialism towards turning Lebanon into “the sectarian state par excellence”. (2011, 2)

Dickinson's words are revealing to the extent that, if works like *Ghabit Shams al-Haqq* can be regarded as cosmopolitan or avant-garde, its use by the refugees in Gaza lent it credibility as an act of solidarity. If the studios of Lebanon owed their existence to capitalist productive relations, the pliability of this music for the oppressed and occupied told a different story. While the presence of recording companies making a profit off of such music (or of the motives of "mukhtars" like Hosni Mubarak or the Kuwaiti royals) could not be denied, the embrace of these singers by grassroots Palestinians shows that acts of musical solidarity are appropriated by those who most need them.

I argue that the songs listed or sung by Raghda demonstrate a deep connection between the singers' careers and the issue of Palestine, to the extent that they have championed the cause in times when it is fashionable internationally to do the exact opposite.²⁹⁶ And what seems notable is that, unlike the Syrian *musiqa mu'asira*, described by Silverstein as occupying the peripheries of national art forums, the careers of these performers does not entirely depend on outside audiences for their commercial survival. (2013, 40) If the interests of a cosmopolitan cultural intelligentsia coincide at a certain point with the oppressed and occupied, then the enthusiastic response of the Palestinians to Julia and Marcel, Qaabour and Lahaam gave an international voice to the revolutionary movement. For Raghda, songs by Julia, Marcel and others contributed to a formative process in her youth, cementing her earlier feelings that the position of the occupied and dispersed Gaza Palestinians was fundamentally unjust, and that the stories of her parents' generation made sense in the context of an uprising against Israeli violence – or vice versa. That said, this did not imply unconditional and eternal support (see Raghda's reflections on Khalife's recent direction in Chapter 8), or an acceptance of the underdeveloped state of local music production. Our next section turns to Palestinian voices and Raghda's personal experiences of the *Intifada*.

7.3 "Like diamonds" – Palestinian songs in Raghda's *Intifada*

If many of the social experiences of the pre-*Intifada* years commemorated the injustices and acts of resistance in 20th century Palestinian history, so too did some of the songs of the rebel

²⁹⁶ The British band Radiohead faced a wave of protests in summer 2017 as it geared up for a gig in Israel, including a Palestinian flag protest at Glastonbury festival.

singers of the uprising. Having lived under repression, narratives were of the past continued to be centrally important to Raghda's family group. Now, with the *Intifada*, Palestinians were attempting to create a narrative of the future. In its early phases, Raghda says, songs *for* or *about* Palestine by singers from other Arab countries were hugely popular, but she would soon witness an upsurge of Palestinian music, as cassette-tape anthems proliferated in a revolutionary environment where women joined men on the streets and Raghda saw music as a way of being involved herself as she entered her teens. But what did this involvement mean? Were there barriers to action which music could overcome? And where are these singing nationalist revolutionaries positioned in regards to the developing consciousness of a young Palestinian girl?

In the previous section, we saw how many of the Arab singers Raghda listened to in her childhood embraced the cause of anti-Zionist struggle. Speaking retrospectively, she hails the role played by these musicians. Nevertheless, Raghda began to feel uneasy about the national situation for music in her generation living under occupation:

“It was a bit of a problem for me because I wanted to listen to Palestinians. There was an old singer called Abu Arab. An old man. There was no internet or TV. We only had Jordanian or Israeli or Egyptian TV, so we didn't have a way to research and find out about those people. But little by little there were Palestinian people.”²⁹⁷

There is a certain restlessness at the heart of these phrases, suggesting that, even at an early age, Raghda was both questioning the infrastructure and environment for Palestinian singers and searching for something beyond the solidarity songs of Julia and Marcel:

“I felt shocked and surprised when I didn't find lot of Palestinian singers. At that time, I was a teenager and wanted to hear people talk about my country, my situation.”

The “upheaval” described by Ioannidou (2017) with the resurgence of folk music and customs in Greek Cypriot weddings had similarities among Palestinian exiles (see Chapter 3 on Kuwait) and was a factor in Gaza too - with a particular difference that the immediate cause was ignited by a specific historic event. That the *Intifada* witnessed an explosion in nationalist song suggests that Raghda's feelings weren't entirely hers alone, and that musicians wanted to be

²⁹⁷ Interview in Manchester, 29 April 2015.

part of the revolution. A clamour for national voices is a hallmark of the music practices of oppressed and occupied groups beyond the borders of the Palestinian issue. (Emery 2015; Bilal 2013) And if modern nationalism is characterised by its cosmopolitan tendencies or, as Turino suggests, by “local peculiarity” and a level of “cultural reformism” (2000, 15), it seems an interesting angle to think that Raghda’s exposure to the icons of Lebanon and Syria had set up certain expectations about content or style. Furthermore, the context of transmission was entirely social.

“During the *Intifada* I still remember there was a band, Al-‘Ashiqeen. Their music made me feel powerful and happy. It made you think about revolution at that time. Those songs tell you that you are still here as the Palestinian people. You know when you're a teenager...”

“*Kano Thalath Rijal... Sabl al-‘Ayoono ...* lots of songs... It reminds me about my family and friends in this period, my camp, Borej camp, and how it was. If I listen to new singers now, for example in Gaza, to be honest I don't feel their songs. But those old songs mean a lot to me. It reminds me of the first resistance. When my brothers started to work with the *Jabha el-Sha‘biyya* (PFLP). When they covered their eyes and went out... It reminds me of those days and about sad feelings. A very bad time and a very hard time but it means a lot to me. I like to remember those days because, yes we have lots of sad things but at the same time people loved each other. Every night my brother and his friends would come to our house and sit with my dad, light the *yarghul* (shisha pipe) and talk about our village, my brother's stories and his experience... I was allowed to sit and listen. The songs mean a lot of things, my country, family, friends, everything. The uprising brought people together.”

Raghda links her difficult memories to family times and emphasises the wider meaning of the songs towards the street experiences of other family members during the *Intifada*. This time of austerity, with road blockades and daily incursions by Israeli forces²⁹⁸ was the context of a coming together, where music was linked with the stories of the past and present.

“*Kano Thulath Rijal*” (“There were three men...”) was the first line in a stanza of poetry in Al-‘Ashiqeen’s version of *Min Sijn ‘Akka* (“From Acre Prison”), a song attributed to British

²⁹⁸ *Intifada*-era killings by Zionist forces at Bureij included the assassination of Maher Mahmud al-Makadma, shot as he painted slogans on a camp wall on 4 October 1989. (UN 1990) During the Second *Intifada* from 2000, PCHR Gaza reported of extra-judicial killings amidst frequent invasions of the camp by IDF troops. (2007) The al-Bureij Massacre on 16 April 2008 saw ten Palestinians killed in an IDF assault, including three children and a Reuters cameraman. (Hagbard 2014)

Mandate era rebel poet Nuh Ibrahim, who was himself jailed in Acre, from where he composed much of his work. McDonald analyses the impact of this song, seen by many as a catalyst for the revolutionary movement and as a pioneering work of Palestinian protest and commemoration. (2003, 52-55) Presenting the verse lyrics, McDonald argues that *Min Sijn 'Akka* “remains a powerful testament to martyrdom and sacrifice in the cause of resistance to colonial authority”. Raghda references lyrics that don't appear in McDonald's work; in addition to Nuh Ibrahim's original lyrics, Al-'Ashiqeen added a spoken word introduction followed by a *mawwal* vocal:

Three men and three cells
And the accusation, the love of Palestine
The penalty is death
Oh 'Ata al-Zeer
Oh Fouad Hijazi
Oh Jamjoum
You three stars
Flying above my land
And from Akka, a funeral came out for three
birds hanging from the heart of the darkness
Spreading my homeland with a stream of light

They were three men, racing towards death
Their feet were raised above the executioner's neck
And they became an example, oh uncle
And they became an example, oh uncle
All over the land of the country
Oh dear (ya 'ain)
I would fall in love with the darkness of prison for you, oh land
You are the land, when you call, your men rise up
On a Tuesday three are waiting you, oh land
who race ahead to give up their souls for you
Oh dear

ثلاث رجال وثلاث زنازين
والتهمة حب فلسطين
والحكم الصادر اعدام

يا عطا الزير
يا فؤاد حجازي
يا مجوم
يا ثلاث نجوم
فوق أرض بلادي بتحوم
وطلعت من عكا جنازة لثلاث
طيور تدلا من قلب العتمة وتفرش
وطني بحزمة نور

كانوا ثلاثة رجال يتسابقوا عالموت
أقدامهم عليت فوق رقبة الجلال
وصاروا مثل يا خال وصاروا مثل يا خال
طول وعرض لبلاد...

يا عين...
نهوا ظلام السجن يا أرض كرمالك
يا أرض يوم تندهي بتبين رجالك
يوم الثلاثاء وثلاث يا أرض ناطرينك
من اللي يسبق يقدم روحه من شأنك
يا عين...

Raghda's memory of the song as "*Kano Thulath Rijal*", the beginning line of the *mawwal* introduction given here in the second stanza, marks out the song's educational qualities towards Palestinian history as something that the young people in the camps latched onto.²⁹⁹ Its lines point to the commemorative qualities of the arrangement, styled with directness in transmission of the history of the Arab revolt, its national dedication and its heroes.³⁰⁰ The assertion that the

²⁹⁹ When I interviewed Arab Idol winner Mohammed Assaf in November 2014 he cited a similar influence: "The songs started coming in the days of the British mandate. Three leaders were executed; they were the leaders of the revolution. So the first song at this time was *Min Sijn 'Akka* about these leaders, and these kind of songs. It all started with the different stages of the Palestinian struggle against occupation and colonialism. And Palestinian revolutionary song had a big effect on the spirit of the people. I mean, for any nation that's under occupation, songs can stimulate the people to resist the occupation. So of course there was *firqat* (band) Al-Ashiqeen and all these songs that I knew since I was a kid, you know. And maybe this was a certain time, but this thing is well rooted in our sentiment as Palestinians."

³⁰⁰ With startling similarities to Ariel Sharon's provocative incursion in September 2000, igniting the Second Intifada, Zionist marchers on 15 June 1929 paraded onto the Haram al Sharif (Temple Mount), reaching al-Buraq wall and claiming ownership of the land, planting their flags and singing the Zionist anthem. This was a culmination of rising settler activity in Jerusalem and sparked what became known by Palestinians as the Buraq revolution – the first significant confrontation between the occupied population and the forces of colonisation, with protests spreading across Palestine over the coming days and weeks. The British High Commissioner John Chancellor put the blame for deaths solely with the Palestinians (Barakat 2018); British forces lay siege to homes and arrested hundreds. 26 were sentenced to death by hanging by the Mandate regime, reduced to three after an

executed men would become “an example” echoes the efforts of Palestinian poets to do just that.³⁰¹ But Raghda’s feelings of empowerment emanating from the music suggest that Al-‘Ashiqeen’s act of commemoration was also fuel for the struggle of the present. For her, listening, learning and singing this and other songs she lists could not be separated from Gaza’s social revolution where her brothers were becoming politically active and to the familial solidarity that shaped her *Intifada*.

If the appropriation or bringing to relevance of *Kano Thulath Rijal* enabled the song to keep a foot in uprisings fifty years apart, another of Raghda’s songs was definitive to the *Intifada* era and raised questions of the space for her own involvement:

“Since 1987, the first *Intifada* we started to listen to music about Palestine, songs about Palestine. There was a band³⁰² who lived in Jordan, they sang a song I still remember to this day... [Sings] “*nzilna ‘al-shawarya, rafa‘na al-rayat*” [“We went down to the streets and unfurled our banners”]. Listen! Those songs let you move, make you feel something because they are singing about your country and about your history, your everything. You can taste every word.”³⁰³

upsurge of Palestinian anger. Fuad Hijazi, Atta Al-Zeer, and Mohammad Khalil Jamjoun were executed an hour apart at Acre prison on 17 June 1930:

“They had spent their last night singing the famous song: *Ya Thalam Is Sijni Khayem* (Oh darkness of the prison set up, we love the darkness. There is nothing after the night but the dawn of glory to rise). Before their execution, Mohammad and Ata asked for Henna to paint their hands following the Hebron custom of painting the hands of bridegrooms on the day of their wedding.” (2009 avoicefrompalestine.wordpress.com; accessed 12 April 2016)

Akka or Acre had become a site of protest to the pro-Zionist British regime (Mansour 2013) and 17 June became known as Red Tuesday. Through its actions Britain had martyred three Palestinians who would achieve legendary status, as contemporary newspaper *Palestine* declared in bold type:

“Execution of Fouad Hijazi, Ata Al-Zeer, and Muhammad Jamjoun. A result of the Balfour Declaration policy. Let the blood of these martyrs, the righteous children of Palestine, water the roots of the tree of Arab independence. Commemorate this day every year.” (PRIME 2003, 13)

³⁰¹ Poet Ibrahim Touqan, a regular in the nationalist press at the time, immortalised the story of ‘the three heroes’ in his poem *The Red Tuesday*:

Their bodies rest in the soil of the homeland
 Their souls are the Paradise of Pleasure
 Where there is no complaint about tyranny
 Where tolerance and forgiveness overflow (Abdo 2014)

³⁰² Raghda forgets the name of the band and I returned to this question at another date but the name still eluded her. I asked whether it was Jordan-based band Baladna (Our country), who did perform a version of the song, but Raghda doesn’t recognise the name.

³⁰³ Interview in Manchester, 12 June 2014.

Nzilna 'al-Shawarya was recorded by its writer, Ramallah-based singer and *oud* player Walid Abdalsalam and released on cassette in 1987. Musically its arrangement is simple, with only *oud* and a single tabla/darbouka backing with occasional hand claps. Walid's voice is double tracked in parts and another male voice adds harmony and unison towards the end of the song as the music gathers in intensity. It is the female voice, however, that is perhaps most striking in at a time when women were gaining more prominence in the underground performance of *Intifada* songs. For the most part she sings in unison but is given something of a free role. With the phrase, "Songs for freedom, for national unity" (اغاني للحرية للوحدة الوطنية), her voice separates from Walid's lead vocal, which follows the *oud*, as the backing vocalist follows her own path. The two voices reunite for the successive line, "For the people's war, the path to victory" (للحرب للشعبية طريق الانتصارات). The slight shakiness to the female voice on the word for "victory", or more precisely "victories" (انتصارات) suggests that she is untrained, pointing to the involvement of "ordinary" Palestinians in extraordinary acts during the *Intifada*. Hers was a young voice, probably not much older than Raghda and her sisters. The simplicity of the musical arrangement and rough and ready nature of its recording and performance might point to Walid's urgency to get it out to the young people involved in the *Intifada* on the streets. Though not reaching the studio access of the Lebanese and Syrian stars discussed, his 1989 album "Peace to the kids of the country" (سلام لولاد البلد) would be a much more polished production.

But who took to the streets? And, barely 10 years old at the outbreak of protests and the release of *Nzilna 'al-Shawarya*, what could Raghda do? The lyrics identified the joys of the homeland with the youth of Palestine fighting Israeli soldiers with stones:

Be happy my country, the children are keeping watch

For the eyes of the cause, with rocks in their hands

افرحي يا بلادي ظلوا ولاد صغار

لعيون القضية بيديهم حجار

Interestingly the word *shabab*, more clearly meaning boys or young men, is not used, with Walid referring instead to the *wlad* (ولاد) as the guardians of national sovereignty. While the word, strictly speaking, means "boys", in this context its meaning is more inclusive, translated more appropriately as "kids" or "children". Raghda may have picked up on this phrase as an

invitation to join the ranks of the *Intifada*; she could “taste every word” and says that the songs let her move. There were limitations and frustrations that the music could help her overcome:

“If you imagine, as a girl sitting at home, you’re not allowed to go out and throw stones, your family won’t let you. So for me to learn these songs was a way of being involved. It was like a bridge. I was very sensitive to what was happening.”³⁰⁴

If, unlike her older brothers, Raghda could not stand on the front line, she still identifies herself as being part of the generation of the stones, “involved” through listening and singing the songs of the *Intifada*. Her description of music being a bridge to her involvement echoed the lyrics of *Bektub Ismik* and other songs of her earlier years and puts some of her experiences in a new light. Raghda’s words implied that she didn’t want to “just” commemorate the past in a way that “singing about your history” might have implied, but desperately wanted to be a part of the struggle of the present. Other songs she had known from a younger age, including *’Al-Raba’iyyeh* and *Sabl al-’Ayoono* were brought into the *Intifada* by musicians keen to link traditional forms and folk melodies to the anti-Zionist movement. Raghda recalls singing these songs years before the *Intifada* and her prior knowledge offered a realisation that their words carried real significance to her as a young girl barred from taking part in the fighting. In her stories of the first *Intifada* she doesn’t view herself as a bystander to historic events. Music was a bridge to her involvement and through the besieged family-neighbourhood of Bureij camp, the experiences of her brothers, the stories of elders and the songs and lyrics of *Intifada*-era classics, the Palestinian narrative was transmitted and performed with her and other youngsters. This was Raghda’s way of being active - she simultaneously became a musician, historian and Palestinian.

7.4 The cassette tape rebellion: No country for old men?

In two separate exchanges in Manchester, two years apart, Raghda spoke of how the songs of the *Intifada* made it to her at her family home in Bureij camp:

³⁰⁴ Interview in Manchester, 29 April 2015.

“How I listened to this music is that my brother bought a cassette. Oh my god, it was like a diamond. Really! ‘Hide it here... Be careful!’ Because it was so important to us. The music gave us many feelings. You felt that, you are in your land. We were evacuated from my land.”³⁰⁵

“Last week I was talking with Awatif about that time and how it was. The music is very precious for us. Really important for us. I remember my brother had a cassette... if someone would touch it... it’s not allowed! And if I think about the price of this cassette, its nothing. But I think the value of this cassette was not the money. It was for people like us who liked to sing it. At that time, everything for me was as a dream. Something I can’t touch in my hand. Maybe because of all this I began to like music more and more.”

The experience of radio and later cassette culture in Egypt suggested that the tools of the military and conservative religious figures could be subverted, reappropriated, or challenge existing music and media monopolies. (Castelo-Branco 1987) In the 70s and 80s, says Armbrust, cassette tapes had become the most lively medium for political debate and discussion after print media. (2000) In music, Wallis and Malm say that the cassette brought opportunity, symbolising the “transnationalization” of music which breeds a counterreaction as technology is manipulated for social change. (1990, 161) Hutnyk replies that the critiques of “technologically rampant capitalism” often serve on one hand as laments for pre-industrial music, present in the narratives of Womad and “world music”, and on the other in the idea of “music as alternative”. (2000, 26) Can mass cultural production under imperialism truly serve a grassroots working class or revolutionary/anti-colonial agenda?

Discussing Jimi Hendrix, Gilroy points to the ability of black and oppressed groups to use technology to offer “healing glimpses of an alternative moral, artistic, and political order.” (2010, 147) In the *Intifada*, Palestinian communities in Gaza for a moment took control of production in other areas of social provision. The cosmopolitanism entwined with this process for Palestine is anticipated in the twists and turns of nationalist interplay in Egypt, between sovereign Arab forms of expression and versions of “modernisation” leaning strongly towards Western mass media. Out of the *Intifada*’s explosion of cassette tape reproduction, Shafiq Kabha, Rim Banna and less well known *thawri* singers and groups. A not so distant previous generation had featured *oud*-toting singer-songwriters such as Sheikh Imam, Mustafa al-Kurd or vocalists like Abu Arab. Raghda’s restlessness with what she saw as the underdeveloped

³⁰⁵ Interview in Manchester, 12 June 2015.

state of local music where, “we didn’t have Palestinian singers”, perhaps explains her off-hand dismissal of “old men”. When they came, the new generation were more technology-savvy, perhaps because they had to be – and the rough urgency hinted at by the release of tracks like *Nzilna ‘al-Shawarya* suggested that they were in a rush to be heard.

Echoing Armbrust’s call for a challenge to ahistorical views on the role of technology, a picture of this “dream”-like period in Raghda’s youth can be drawn through the strains of her relationship to the musical artefacts brought into her home. She has been looking, or listening out for Palestinians who could relate to her familial state of exile in Bureij. When she got hold of them, they were like “diamonds”, breaking through the poverty and underdevelopment that characterised the camp.³⁰⁶ It was through a social connection to music, stories and Palestinian nationalism that her earlier experiences began to make sense. The precious quality of the musical narrative enriched it with use value that could build bridges to the streets and, given that many of the singers were also Lebanese and Syrian – and it is important that not to paint a separation that Raghda herself does not overdetermine – facilitate a space for developing solidarity and consciousness. If Burkhalter can suggest of Lebanon, that local platforms are small, only reaching well-educated elites, the scene of historic mass upheaval suggests different possibilities. (2003, 98) The *Intifada* was such an opportunity for musical and revolutionary understanding.

7.5 Coda to the *Intifada*: bridges and barriers

The *Intifada* went through the motions in its final years as the exiled PLO leadership moved towards negotiation and drastic compromise with Israel and its backers. For many, the real fire of insurrection, its mass participation and frontlining of women, had been dampened years before Oslo, an agreement that brought many exiled Palestinians “back” to Gaza - the friends of Arafat’s leadership in particular. “What did these people bring us?” Raghda asks, bitterly. “New restaurants, new life... But not in the camps.”³⁰⁷ To conclude this chapter, I draw on debates and documentary material on the role of women in the *Intifada* towards understanding

³⁰⁶ Speaking to Manal Massalha, an al-Hadaf activist named Mohammed reported of the funds and materials passed from ‘48 Palestinians to the West Bank and Gaza: “A hungry person cannot be creative and does not have the time to produce.” (2014, 216)

³⁰⁷ Interview in Manchester, 10 June 2015.

Raghda's own narrative of this new era, broadening out to asking what her transmission of these memories add to existing knowledge of women and girls' involvement. With one eye on the next chapter and Raghda's move to Britain, this section looks at the implications in Gaza of the eventual defeat of the uprising with Oslo and the "peace process" and views on the role played by both religious conservatism and a normalised occupation at the tail end of the *Intifada* and in the post-Oslo years.

During the uprising, women were physically beaten by IDF troops, many while protecting their homes and men from arrest or brutality, including some adolescent and younger girls. (Strum 1998, 143; Morgan 1998) Imprisoned women faced sexual abuse and psychological torture. (Thornhill 1992) In a highly politicised environment, mundane acts of healthcare and funerals became demonstrations of solidarity, with women leading "the *Intifada*'s campaign for self-reliance and increased local and home production, which aimed at loosening the chains of Palestinian dependency on the Israeli economy." (Swedenburg 2003, 187; Baroud 2018, 113) In its most radical moments, the *Intifada* questioned traditional values and expectations of women in the home. According to Suha Subbagh, men took up household chores, while women poured out of the private sphere of the home and into the streets:

"Their very participation indicates a transformation of consciousness: through the spontaneous act of participating in the confrontation with Israeli soldiers, women have challenged their traditional role, which requires their exclusion from the public sphere. Their priorities have shifted from protecting their homes and traditional values to risking everything in order to loosen the grip of occupation. Given the influence that these women traditionally exert within the home, it is not difficult to imagine that the challenge to some patriarchal norms will have long-term repercussions for gender relations within the family, the exact nature of which remains to be seen." (1998, 14)

These cultural shifts were a backdrop to what Raghda describes as a "revolution in our house", where her mother's fears of the neighbours' reactions to hearing the children sing were swept away in the energy of family enthusiasm for the songs of the *Intifada*. "My dad helped us... we didn't give up!" she laughs. Though often coloured in melancholy tones, Raghda's memories focus on the togetherness at home, while her assertion that "people loved each other" points beyond their walls to Bureij camp and wider Palestine.

Discussions of women and girls in the *Intifada* highlight areas of temporary progress, religious impulses and retreats concurrent with the strategies of Arafat, the PLO and later Hamas. Hilterman writes that the UNLU leadership, for instance, refused to endorse the hijab, yet is seen as failing to address wider women's issues, calling for *sumud*, but not female involvement on the streets. (1998, 102) Women were mobilised by the *Intifada* who were not mobilised before it by women's organisations, hailing a "social revolution" that had by its third year not significantly altered the position of women. (Hilterman 1998, 99) The rise of Hamas in particular, says Swedenburg, heralded the disintegration of women's activism, alongside a different kind of "*Intifada* culture" than Raghda describes, now based on austerity and religious honour, acting to curb beach activity, music and weddings, and hitting women hardest. (2003, 191) A reversion of activism to normalised spheres meant that "they had done little to truly challenge women's subordinate status once the crisis ended." (Swedenburg 2003, 194) Conclusions therefore vary in their relative visions of the *Intifada*'s implications for the future. Despite her optimism, Sabbagh echoes Jad's concerns on the reestablishment of "means of controlling women's behaviour", through fundamentalist and patriarchal imposition of the hijab. (Jad 1998, 124) Like many Palestinians, Raghda is scathing of the politicians of Oslo, presenting a lack of progress for music making as a measuring stick for wider issues. Did a heightened religious environment point the way for the subordination of women after the agreement? And did her musical bridge to involvement in Palestinian affairs fall down with the end of the *Intifada*?

If 1993 was a year of political strife, it was for seventeen year-old Raghda no less historic: within the space of a year, she would marry and divorce her cousin and, throwing light on an unhappy period, give birth to her son Motaz. Her personal journey hinted at both the communal pressures and openings in Palestinian society at this particular moment, refracted in her family around a wedding, pushed for by her "more religious" mother, and divorce, supported by her brother and eventually the whole household. Although told in different conversations, Raghda's memory of a "revolution" for music at home references this process and points to wider issues in Gaza.

Raghda's family didn't urge her to remarry and her brothers helped out with young Motaz as she studied and later worked. As a pregnant young woman she'd had to leave school but was allowed to continue her studies at Al-Azhar College. She remembers feeding the baby on the bus in the morning while waiting for the other ladies, and her mother would take him home for

the day: “It was a very difficult time but thank god I got through it!” Al-Azhar was “very religious”, with no music, and students “were not allowed to mix” with others at the nearby universities. But, laughing, Raghda explains that she “escaped” to political parties and rallies at a neighbouring campus:

“At that time it was very difficult to find festivals or concerts to listen to music, only at the university, that's it. It was political music about revolution, about *Intifada*, about the movement. It's not emotional music [laughs]. This was after Oslo.”

Alongside her studies, Raghda began singing publicly for the first time, leading groups at the Women's Empowerment Project (WEP), a branch of Gaza Community Mental Health Project. Raghda describes these sessions as therapy for women in difficult situations, with histories of violence or separation from their children. The songs she lists include a mix of political anthems and the repertoire of the giants of Arab music. In Warda's *Khaleek Hina*, she sings of the pain of goodbyes, the defeats of love and a man who “left here a wounded lover”. The women, Raghda says, “were suffering and don't like to talk”. Many of the songs offered catharsis:

Between you and me, desertion, disloyalty, and the pain I hid in my heart

بيني وبينك هجر وغدر وجرح قلبي داريته

(Umm Kulthum, *Fat il-Ma'ad*)

The past is for you, tomorrow is for you, and the day after is for you

الماضي لك وبكرة لك وبعده لك

(Mayada al Hennawi, *Ana Ba'sha'ak*)

Give me my freedom, release my hands

Indeed, I've given you yours and did not try to retain anything

أعطني حريتي أطلق يديا إني
أعطيت ما استبقيت شيئا

(Umm Kulthum, *al-Atlal*)

Other examples sung by the women were straight out of the *Intifada* songbook, with new material by Rim Banna added to revolutionary anthems from Julia Boutros, Al-‘Ashiqeen and Marcel Khalife, among others. If the WEP operated on the fringes of the post-Oslo environment, picking up the pieces that the Palestinian leadership had been unable or unwilling to resolve, such performances showed that space could still be found for revolutionary nationalist and feminist narratives. In relationships with other women, Raghda says, “I was a revolutionary!”, insisting on their rights to separation or to see their children:

“I still remember two ladies. They were very embarrassed to sing or talk about their cases. But they knew that whatever problem I had in my life I am still singing. And they heard it. They started to believe that they are human beings, they have rights. Singing can help people discover themselves.”

She sees music as a source of empowerment in period where the dominant social forces were discouraging towards music, affecting her family and neighbourhood after Oslo, with expressions of disappointment taking on conservative forms: “They became more religious, my mum, my camp, Bureij. They think about *Intifada* but not about music... We don't have an environment for music to grow. I wish we did.”

Amidst a series of articles and essays on the “Talibanisation” of Gaza under Hamas (Schanzer 2008; Toameh 2013), Filipa Pestana assesses its impact in the post-Oslo years on society and women’s participation, quoting a 2010 report from the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), whose investigation found “no grand redesign of governmental institutions in accordance with Islamic principles”. (2016) To Pestana, attempts by Western media and academia to paint Gaza as a fundamentalist statelet ignore the role of outside forces and the Palestinian Authority in cementing positions of inequality. Echoing the works of El-Ghadban (2013) and Beckles Willson (2013) on the contradictions of European and US funding, she finds that:

“After the signature of the Oslo Accords... the role of the women almost disappeared and many of the successful women’s grassroots organizations were transformed into NGOs, mostly connected to Western donors and pursuing liberal-oriented agendas.” (Pestana 2016)

Pestana draws on Mohanty (1991) and Abu-Lughod (2002; 2013) to pick apart the motivations of those seeing Hamas as the primary mover in a post-*Intifada* crisis, pointing to forces governing the “peace” treaty as having a more decisive effect. Put differently, the “NGOisation of the women’s movement” (Jad 2004), is seen as holding back the desires of Palestinian women for social change and development. Raghda’s wearing of the hijab – a requirement of studying at the college, the junior wing of Al-Azhar University, inaugurated by Fatah leader Yasser Arafat in 1991 and funded by Moroccan and Saudi kings – could be seen as part of this process. I argue that, under conditions of colonial Zionist ascendancy, the social conservatism often identified with Hamas has in reality played a secondary role to a “secular” bourgeois Fatah leadership allied to imperialism and NGOism in failing to offer opportunity to working class women to pursue their interests through the linked arenas of political liberation or musical expression. Raghda’s comments on hotels and restaurants point to the privileges of a small section of Gaza society, part of the comprador bourgeoisie described by Massad as benefitting from Oslo. (2006) At the same time, however, Raghda’s memories of musical empowerment point to the cracks in the edifice of occupation and normalisation for class solidarity in the face of a historic revolutionary setback.

Interestingly, Raghda never points to Hamas as the source of her mother’s conservatism towards music and social codes of behaviour in the camp; in the 70s and early 80s, she remembers seeing women in miniskirts and remarks on how things had changed. Writing against gendered orientalism in *Do Muslim Women Need Saving*, Abu-Lughod suggests that, “Islam in village life is variegated and constantly evolving. There are generational differences related to the political, social, economic, and cultural transformations in Egypt over the past decades.” (2013, 188) I see this understanding as crucial towards viewing what some may see as the “Azharisation” of Gaza in historical terms. Hamas’ early insistence on codes of religious modesty, domestication and ascription of a maternal role to women in the movement were later reconsidered towards promoting female resistance and electoral candidates. (Hroub 2006, 75; Khalili 2007, 30) Hamas leaders have not, in recent years, taken a “music is *haram*” line, instead seeing culture as a potential weapon against Zionist colonialism, and a means for bringing young people into action. McDonald writes on the genre of *anashid*, or religious anthems, developing alongside the *sha‘bi* styles adopted by the PLO and utilised increasingly in the era of the Al-Aqsa *Intifada* (from 2000), charting the rise of Mais Shalash and the imitation of Quranic recitation in this music (2013, 128); one could see the combination of this

style with electro-*dabke* beats in *Ukht al-Marjleh* (see Introduction chapter) as a further opening of Hamas' cultural wing towards the musical styles popular with Palestinian youth.³⁰⁸

But Raghda doesn't see Hamas as liberating for music either and, although her fire is often reserved for the PA, she doesn't cover any of the leading factions in glory: "Music is not the priority of Fatah, Jabha³⁰⁹ or Hamas... It's non-alcoholic. Not part of their plan. Music should be the priority of any country or any people who have control." The NGOs and politicians were instead working to enrich themselves:

"In 1998 the Ministry of Culture had a programme for music, and I applied for it, but after that it stopped. During the war I think the people who are responsible felt happy. Because they'd write reports and get money. I used to administrate. Everything is numbers. Yes, at the end people get a benefit from these organisations but I'm talking about the people who are responsible for bringing donations. These organisations only think about money and themselves."

Raghda's reflections raise questions about the state of the Palestinian movement and her own position as a woman singer. A focus of her *Intifada* memories looked to the grassroots, communal and guerrilla-produced music as a way of being involved, a "bridge" for a young girl to participate in a revolutionary struggle. The songs reached her in conditions of underdevelopment and powerful female voices from sister nations offered her role models as she sang at home and absorbed narratives of the past and present stories of the homeland from other family members. Later, as a young woman, a whirlwind marriage and divorce took her out of school and into the only college that would accept her; at Al-Azhar, "most of us were divorced." The decline of the women's movement after the *Intifada* and societal expressions of religiosity were given no relief by the Oslo accords' pendulum shift to a rampant Israel.

³⁰⁸ In focusing on what seems to be an accepting of certain cultural realities by Hamas, I don't want to overemphasise the point. Female musicians in Gaza have reported of being told to stop performing and smoking shisha (personal correspondence). In general, however, the resignation of the Hamas government of Gaza, ceding "power" to Abbas' PA regime in October 2017, may further emphasise the view that the ultimate source of women's oppression is not Hamas' brand of Islam, but the dispossession of its inhabitants by Zionist colonialism.

³⁰⁹ An important source for Raghda's radical outlook could be seen in the influence of secular, Marxist politics in the family, as some of her fondest memories of the *Intifada* involve her brothers' involvement in the PFLP. It was during this period of revolution that the "diamonds" of Palestinian music were brought into the home on cassette. Naguib reports of opposition to al-Sulta (the Palestinian Authority) and Hamas in Musharafah village, amidst a strong Soviet influence. Um Fathi tells her that, "It is the communists who gave us our strength to fight against injustice in our village." (2009, 56)

Raghda gravitated towards other women and wanted to share her voice. Singing was therapy and to the women, the songs of the *Intifada* were compatible with transcendent anthems of love.

But at a certain point, guerrilla music was not enough. As Turino suggests in his study on Zimbabwe, the goal of nationalist movements is not merely the promotion of national sentiment, but the securing of a state (2000, 14); although note should be taken of the grassroots opposition to the “statehood” bids of the Palestinian leadership at the UN, rejecting the right of return and a broad fight against colonial settlements. In her final years in Gaza before moving to Britain, Raghda says that the Israeli blockade reigned supreme, but had had the unintended effect of pushing women out of the house and into working to feed their families: “The siege of Gaza made a big difference. The political and economic situation has made attitudes to women different. Everything is different.” I asked Raghda what she felt the solution was to the problems she described in music:

“I’ll be the minister of culture! [laughs] We have lots of people who believe in music in Gaza. But, same as me, we don’t know what to do. To build music in your country you need money. People to support you. Then day by day the viewpoint of music will change. Lots has changed since 1996. It was very difficult for women to leave the home. But now it’s very easy. People agree and accept that. This is what I mean about music, we need a revolution.”

Chapter 8: Music, memory and a British prison

“Al-Raba’iyyeh is a nice song, when you get out of jail...”³¹⁰

“I got sent to a hostel in Wakefield. On 10 April they refused me. I thanked god and went to my room and listen to music. I went to the garden and started to listen to music because I was sure nothing else would take away my stress, only music.”

“People my age, in their 40s or 50s don't accept emotional music. They grew up with political song or music about their village.... It's not fair to make them listen to emotional songs when they are suffering from the occupation.”

Our case studies on Reem and Saied hinted at two categories of complex relationships between exiled Palestinians and Britain. Chapter 4 looked at the “world music” industry as a site for the pursuit of profit and disenfranchisement of political sounds, encapsulating the contradictions of Britain’s supposed multicultural policies and forcing a musician committed to a Palestinian resistance narrative to find space elsewhere. In Chapter 6 I looked briefly at the uneasy decision of a musician to come to a country identified as a source of his nation’s troubles, partly motivated by a desire to boycott Zionist institutions. For Raghda, the Israeli bombardment of Gaza in 2009 was the last straw. The following year, she took the step of what she hoped would be a short-lived separation with 15 year-old Motaz; a refugee from an unliveable location.³¹¹ During work with Gujeratis in Britain, Baily met musicians who were “twice migrants” from East Africa (2006); Raghda had been brought up in Bureij refugee camp and was now a refugee for a second time.

Unlike Gaza, Britain was not a warzone, but conditions would prove perilous. Within days of arriving, before she’d even got her head around the Home Office and asylum system, she was imprisoned in Yarl’s Wood immigration removal centre. Distraught, she sought solidarity in

³¹⁰ Interview in Manchester, 20 May 2015.

³¹¹ A June 2017 report by the United Nations documented the drastically worsening living conditions in the Gaza Strip during 10 years of Israeli blockade. It cited the deterioration of healthcare, education and electricity (down to just 3 hours a day) as markers that Gaza was becoming “unlivable”. (United Nations Country Team in the occupied Palestinian Territory 2017).

friendships with other refugee women and, when she was released three weeks later, used music as an outlet or coping mechanism throughout the arduous process of dispersal, application, rejection and appeal. Later, when Raghda was reunited with Motaz and got her “papers” or leave to remain, she continued to sing for family members, children and friends, and sometimes publicly, and maintains a repertoire of revolutionary anthems, traversing the bridge of separation between Manchester and Palestine.

This chapter constitutes the second half of a case study on Raghda and focuses discussion of social memory, concrete conditions of migrancy and the role played by music in the life of a Palestinian refugee woman in Britain. Building on an understanding of the consciousness developed in Gaza during Raghda’s youth and the formative processes of her young adulthood, this chapter is divided into three parts. The first deals with Raghda’s imprisonment and traversal of a hostile refugee reception system in Britain, drawing on Vickers and Sivanandan on the British state, and Aouragh and Baroud on contemporary Palestinian exile, to frame listening habits and functions of music. Referencing Bilal’s work on Armenian lullabies in Turkey, I argue that the repressive machinery of the British state often serves to force musical performance and transmission into the margins. Yet, Raghda emerges from this state repression into rebuilding her relationship with a defiant, revolutionary music. Focusing on this theme, a second section views a rejection of “emotional music” through the perspective of recent academic and political discussion of *sumud* and resistance narratives of Palestinian nationalism. Finally, drawing out some of the experiences of other exile and refugee groups, I conclude with a forward-looking analysis of the ability of Palestinian song to be passed on in hostile conditions, looking to Raghda’s love for singing to children and returning to the theme of Palestinian women in traditions of music transmission in the *ghorba*.

8.1 Asylum, apartheid, sing

“In Yarl’s Wood, it was a very, very hard experience. You meet so many people talking about many things... from Eritrea, from Ethiopia... I met my first friend in the UK, Suzanne from Lebanon, and it made it easier for me because she used to live in London, she had a life there and a husband, and she started telling me about asylum and everything. I felt sorry for the children, their families. I met ladies who were in detention for six months and I thought it would happen to me, six months without

contact from the Home Office. They were really suffering and I was really confused. My friend Leila from Morocco told me that she spent three years in Yarl's Wood without any answer, and she doesn't know why. She used to live in the UK – for 16 years. She was a belly dancer and had been performing here. She showed me pictures of her in a magazine, she had been famous... It was very hard for her. Some of the officers used to play with the ladies. They take advantage of their situation...”³¹²

“If I didn't have music, I would die. In my house, if I feel depression, my medication is music, that's it, believe me. I like music Louis, it's my boyfriend [laughs]. Because music is everything. Language for everything. They key to everything. I think music is very important for people.”

Hatim Kanaaneh writes that in 1977, in the middle of a rising confrontation in Galilee, “imams in mosques and folk singers at village weddings are being interrogated and even jailed by the Shin Bet for making traditional pronouncements that have nationalistic overtones.” (2008, 4) The only pronouncement Raghda had made was, “I want to claim asylum.” Britain had supported the most recent Israeli bombardment of Gaza³¹³ and it seems more than a curiosity to suggest that Raghda's three years of Home Office rejection was because – and not *in spite* – of this political reality. Being run through the mill of Britain's “asylum apartheid” system (Mynott 2000) meant that Raghda, like others seeking asylum, was barred from working, volunteering or studying, and was “dispersed” to temporary accommodation centres in far-flung locations, on an income of £30 a week in supermarket vouchers. “Everything I requested, the response was, “It's not allowed”.”

At the time of writing, the system described above has been tightened, with the reality that Palestinians are currently unable to be deported meaning little in the way of consolation.³¹⁴ With Vickers (2012) and Jameson (2015), I situate the British immigration policy towards its

³¹² Six years after Raghda's detention in Yarl's Wood, current women prisoners continued to report of sexual abuse by guards. (Fenton 2016)

³¹³ A House of Commons committee on strategic export controls itself found that British arms exports were “almost certainly” used by Israel in Operation Cast Lead (28/12/2008-18/1/2009). While some MPs from the ruling Labour Party were vocal in describing the Israeli attack as a war crime, the government stopped short of ending the arms deals.

³¹⁴ An aim of successive governments has been to wear applicants down to the extent that they remain in limbo after their case has been rejected, and then “voluntarily” leave. During the course of this study, I have met refugees from the West Bank who have lived in Britain more than 10 years without papers. The British government has attempted to deport some Palestinian refugees to Egypt, where the authorities immediately sent them back to Britain.

economic and political interests as an imperialist state, exploiting an international reserve army of labour. The discrimination at the heart of the system is described by Sivanandan as having moved from institutionalised racism to domestic neo-colonialism, with implications for migrants from nations Britain has helped to subjugate. (1991, 121) Following on from the analysis of a defunct and ideological “multiculturalism” in Chapter 4, Raghda’s experiences of the asylum system further elaborate on the marginalisation of Palestinian narratives in British society. The relationship between a certain diversity of music on the one hand, and state racism on the other, suggests that while music is saleable, social equality is another matter:

“Despite the effervescent cultural industries, the ‘hybrid’ visibility of Asian cultural forms has not yet translated into any significant socioeconomic redress of multi-racial exclusions within Fortress Europe.” (Hutnyk 2000, 4)

Urgency is added to these words by the expansion of immigration controls, British collaboration in the Calais border wall or cuts to Mediterranean rescue in the years since they were written.³¹⁵ Interestingly, while Raghda had never stepped foot in another prison (despite the arrests of several family members), it is notable that many later used by the Israelis were built by the British for the imprisonment of Palestinian activists.³¹⁶

The Palestinian refugee experience has been told in graphic literary narrative and through a range of political, cultural and academic forms, often pointing to specific experiences in the *ghorba* or *shatat*. Concepts of mobility are shaped by the *Nakba*, *Naksa* and other moments of ethnic cleansing where, according to Miriyam Aouragh, “a notion signifying free movement became a notion signifying force.” (2012, 230) The repressive, colonial character of exile is more often emphasised in its effect on Palestinians living under or in close proximity to the Israeli occupation. In another of Raghda’s favourite songs, “They Stopped Me at the Border” (وقفوني ع الحدود), Marcel Khalife sings:

³¹⁵ The 2016 Immigration Act aims to build a “really hostile environment for illegal immigrants”, in the words of British prime minister Theresa May. Its measures make it easier for the Home Office to deport people and further restricts access to public services. (Vickers 2017)

³¹⁶ These included the British mandate-era Atlit prison (Slymovics 1998, 99) and the notorious HaSharon, which recently incarcerated Hana Shalabi and other women prisoners. (Baroud 2018, 145)

They stopped me at the border, asking for my I.D.
I told them, “It’s in Jaffa, my grandmother’s hiding it”

And with these words, the group split in two
One half carried whips, the other asked, “Where is it?”
“In Palestine,” I cried, and they split me in two
One half at the border, one half in my grandmother’s breast

وقفوني ع الحدود... قال بدن هويتي
قلتلن إن بيافا... مخبايتها ستي

يا كلمة القلتها... تقسموا صفين
صف بكرابيج... وصف يسأل وين
صرخت بفلسطين... فسخوني نصين
نصي على الحدود... ونص بحضن ستي

Farsoun sees the “integration” of Palestinian communities in varied host countries as being determined by the degree of their political influence, organisation or economic role. (2004, 15) The time-limited security of Palestinian refugees was discussed in the earlier discussion of Kuwait, determined by the whims of elites and local forces towards repressive measures as in Jordan in the 60s-70s and Lebanon in the 70s-80s, “Yet despite this, or even because of it, their Palestinian identity and sense of common destiny have been reinforced.” (Farsoun 2004, 15) In Europe, Palestinian refugees come into an environment where ruling class support for Israel conspires with the market-dictated impulses towards migration. (Jameson 2015) They are reduced to tears by Angela Merkel’s televised rejection of the right to stay (Dearden 2015), or crawling through “shit river” on the fringes of the EU. (Baroud 2018)

Remembering her time interned in Yarl’s Wood, Raghda emphasises the grim experiences of the other women, coming from places of war, poverty or abuse. The period of waiting for release is reminiscent of the treatment of Hana Shalabi and other Palestinian women prisoners under Israel’s “administrative detention” regime. (Baroud 2018, 113) But whereas Shalabi was exiled to the blockaded Gaza Strip after her hunger strike in a British-built Zionist jail, Raghda came from Gaza and was captive in Britain itself. Her musical memories coalesce awkwardly: the visit to Al-Qubeiba where she sang under the sky with her father in years when travel was possible; singing at home during the *Intifada* when Bureij camp felt like a liberated zone; or

with the divorced women telling them they should demand their rights. Now, from the camp to the prison, where the snapshots of music-filled enjoyment in otherwise tough moments were distant. If, as Aouragh writes, “The refugee camps are the painful reminders that the current Palestinian “transnational community” has in effect been created by forced migration”, then the British immigration prison must only reinforce this reality. (2012, 76) Julianne Hammer’s words are, I suggest, highly applicable to the system of apartheid asylum in Britain:

“Of course the Palestinian-camp situation of refugees is a negation of integration into the host country. It keeps the Palestinian community in confined spaces and reinforces the playgroup boundaries. It makes the Palestinians, at least those in the camps, identifiable as an alien minority to themselves as well as to the host society.” (2005)

Raghda’s relationship with music during this period is described in terms unfamiliar to her recollections of life in Gaza. Facing hard times away from her family and country, music becomes, for a time, a medicine for coping, surviving, a “boyfriend” - a shoulder to lean on. If in the camp during the *Intifada*, it had been a means to overcome social barriers to resist, it was through three years under the British Home Office regime a strategy just to exist. Recounting her time in prison and playing the waiting game for asylum, singing is markedly absent from the story. Instead, songs become almost private, through headphone-wearing introspection. But however alone she felt at various points, music remained a bridge to Palestine, or rather, from Palestine to her. Upon release from Yarl’s Wood, Raghda describes being sent to a hostel in Yorkshire and her asylum claim was rejected soon after. She turned to:

“Kazim (El-Saher), Julia, Marcel... And English music, Indian music, because to listen to your own music and your words can make you feel down or up... To listen to another music, you don’t know the words. It was on my mp3 player and my sister had put the music on it - I wanted to feel her near me. I was listening to music and I had nobody to talk to about my problems, it was a very hard time.”

There seemed to be no public sphere available in Britain for the expression of these frustrations, a related process, I argue, to the contexts of cultural detachment between lived experiences and memory seen by Bilal towards Armenians in Turkey and referred to in more detail below. (2006) A reflection on her own position, or self-focused therapy, looked beyond the borders of the new environment which had robbed Raghda of her passport. Reaching out to her sister,

through a variety of musical sounds, pointed to a need for collective connections that persisted in spite of the apparently fragmented condition of Palestinian exile existence. For now, Raghda would internalise these thought process and use music as a catalyst for getting through the hard times. However, a curious set of circumstances brought them out into the open when, in the summer of 2013, the year she got her papers, she met a hero of her youth while working cash-in-hand at a restaurant in Manchester.

During the *Intifada*, Lebanese-born Ahmad Kaabour had been part of a group of singers “saying the things we wanted to say”, Raghda had said earlier; his song *Ounadikom* (“I’m calling out to you all”) was an anthem of the *Intifada* years and remains part of the Palestinian protest song repertoire. (Massad 2013; McDonald 2013) Raghda regretted being unable to see Marcel Khalife on tour in 2013 – “I knew only two days before and my financial situation was very bad” – but Kaabour’s intimate set at a charity fundraiser in Manchester was more accessible. After the performance, he was invited to the restaurant, where Raghda describes an emotional meeting:

“I sang to him one of his songs that I used to sing in Gaza, “*ismaho awwal Nabil*” (“His first name in Nabil”). Not many people sing this song and when he heard this song he said “Oh, that’s a very old song!” and I said to him, all my family still sing this song.”³¹⁷

Kaabour’s surprise at the endurance of the song in the hearts of this Palestinian family is underlined in its rarity in recorded form, seemingly existing on a scant few mp3 websites and on the cassette version of the *Ounadikom* album.³¹⁸ Like the title track, the song encapsulates visions of the revolutionary struggle, personified around a guerrilla leader:

His first name is Nabil
And his identity:
An Arab leader and hero
He plants and grows the other heroes
In the belly of the pregnant land

³¹⁷ Interview in Manchester, 10 June 2015.

³¹⁸ To underline this point, at the time of writing, the most-viewed Youtube version of *Nabil* has barely a few thousand hits, while two versions of *ounadikom* have 2.7 million views between them. (March 2018) *Nabil* is missing from vinyl releases containing this classic track, which I found only as a cassette on mail order from the Educational Bookshop on Salaheddin Street in Jerusalem’s Old City.

A shape of freedom
A colour of revolution

إسمه الأول نبيل
والهوية
قائد عروبي بطل
يمد يد الأبطال ويزرعها
في بطن الأرض الحبل
شكلا للحرية
لونا للثورة

This chorus is inclusive, with lines lacking the definite article “al” (ال), suggesting that Nabil could be anyone, anywhere in the Arab communities of the downtrodden. In *Ounadikom*, Kaabour explicitly called out to the collective from first-person verses, shaking off fear and praising the masses defending the land, and kissing the soil beneath their feet. *Nabil*, following after its more famous counterpart on the album, then plants the seeds for other revolutionaries to grow. Musically, the lilting 6/8 guitar ostinato could have been lifted from Irish music, while the vocal phrasing and choral arrangement seem almost to reference *nueva trova* and the socialist-activist musicians of Latin America.³¹⁹ Raghda’s reporting of the reaction to her singing categorises the song as something historical, belying its progressive, internationalist arrangement. Actually, this multilingual approach tied Kaabour to a burgeoning trend in the radical tradition of Palestinian/pro-Palestinian output towards incorporating the cosmopolitan influences of exile, related, I argue, to the approaches of Reem Kelani and Saied Silbak discussed in this thesis; Kaabour was not himself a Palestinian refugee, but experienced the Israeli destruction of his own area of Beirut.³²⁰

In the last chapter showed how Gaza Palestinians adopted these regional icons as their own. Now, as a refugee once more in a faraway land, Raghda yearned to reconnect. In a musical sense, meeting Ahmad Kaabour reminded her of the abilities of her voice to build bridges, commemorate Palestinian resistance and overcome a new kind of oppression. If the song’s anonymous main character was able to plant seeds of freedom and revolution, maybe the

³¹⁹ I am thinking particularly of Cuban troubadour Silvio Rodriguez, but Chilean group Quilapayun also come to mind with Kaabour’s arrangement.

³²⁰ The Horsh area is famed for its huge park, a green space virtually closed to the public for over 20 years due to widespread damage, including the burning of its trees by the Israeli invasion of 1982. (Wood 2014)

location of the soil didn't matter so much. Moreover, singing out in the open after years and months of destitution and detention in Britain, Kaabour's music struck a note of solidarity. Her sister's mp3 list had taken her back to another world of associative memories where, eyes closed, the walls of the camp and the familial warmth within it were conjured up as small comfort to the realities of life in the *ghorba*. But maybe getting to grips with this situation required public acts as well.

Following Flores Khalili's work on evocations of precolonial pasts (2003), Dickinson sees linguistic and mythical ties to tradition as a route for Arab musicians to connect with a precolonial past, quoting Iraqi vocalist Aida Nadeem's vow:

"You might force us to leave the country, you might set up a dictatorship, you might destroy the country, but our Iraqi heritage, the memories from my city, won't die and I'll keep singing about it. Maybe in a different colour or different style, but it will always be there and that will keep it for generations on. This is my resistance." (Dickinson 2013)

The tradition I refer to by quoting these works in this context is not musically formalistic or specific to one style – as Raghda's listening habits and Ahmad Kaabour's songs defy clear categorisation – but to a commitment through music to collective memory that defies an oppressive social context. Moreover, however much it was steeped in collective narratives of heroism and dramatised stories of historic loss, the past that Raghda connected to was not mythical. Learning *Nabil* and other songs by Palestinian and other Arab artists was, for her and her siblings, a study in historic participation and revolutionary struggle. In Britain, her "home" environment did not face Zionist military attack, death or the kind of poverty that came with the blockade of Gaza, but it was nevertheless a shock to the system.

The form of her musical confrontation with these obstacles varied but, as hinted at in the next section, her commitment to a narrative of resistance endured. In the period after receiving her papers, Raghda also attended Palestine solidarity protests and, occasionally, other political events. Britain had systematically denied her the space to function socially and musically. But, if in other circumstances of oppression, the public sharing of experiences of violence and oppression has proved impossible, as Bilal writes, quoting de Laurentis and the "cracks" in the apparatus of power, Raghda embodies a fight from the margins to exploit what little space exists for refugees in Britain. (2006) She would not remain silent and music and political

engagement were a route out of the kind of victimhood and alienation described above by Hammer. Moving on from her time in prison was essential, but her musical memories were a lifeline.

8.2 “We don’t accept emotional music”: singing, *sumud* and commemoration

“Do you believe in peace?” she asked. “Netanyahu or Ehud Barak or Tzipi Livni... each one of them uses Gaza as a win card. So how can I believe that Israelis want to live in peace?” During our interviews and social chats, Raghda would talk of music as an object of love, a stress-reliever, or language capable expressing meaning infinitely more relatable than the political leaders engaged in “talks” about the future of her homeland with those occupying it. She’d stress that the type of music didn’t matter, that music brought her a sense of calm. But at the same time, she could not disconnect it from the world around her. “If I want to sing, I will. But after that I have to cope with society.”

In the period after getting “status” in Britain, marked by rejection from employment and volunteering opportunities, but at the same time enlightened by the birth of her nephew in London, Raghda looked for openings for singing for and with others. Mostly, this meant singing for friends or family, or having little get-togethers at home, but sometimes her voice ventured out. One time, she sang *a cappella* at an anti-racist fundraiser in Manchester, singing the folksong ‘*Al-Rozana* and Marcel Khalife’s *Rita and the Rifle*. It was her first, and at the time of writing, her only solo gig. Around this time, Raghda also joined a local women’s choir, although she never sang at their concerts:

“They told me ‘please Raghda, next time bring a song from your culture, in your language,’ but all of their songs are about God. And for me I don’t just want to sing about God. I want to sing about other things.”

She enjoyed these sessions but something didn’t work for her, which she linked to her issues with modern Arabic popular music, exemplified by the “commercial” direction taken by Mohammed Assaf. Songs about love or religion were problematic:

“People my age, in their 40s or 50s, don't accept emotional music. They grew up with political song or music about their village. So it's not easy for them to listen to emotional songs. In Palestinian music, they don't accept this. That's my view. But from Umm Kulthum they will accept anything - her songs are about love. I don't know why, but from Palestinian singers they don't accept this.”

“But I like Assaf. I like the singers who give me nice melodies and words to *feel* the music. People in my country, before, it was all about suffering and the Palestinian situation. It's not fair to make them listen to emotional songs when they are suffering from the occupation. We don't have this environment for Palestinian music. I listen to Rim Banna and Reem Kelani regularly. Their music is not my type, but I like to listen to new things. I like to listen to Assaf because he's from Gaza. We have grown up with the same situation, the same problems. So when he sings, I feel him. Maybe because I think he looks like my son. Not much because of his music...”

“Maybe after Assaf, music is too commercial. They want to sing and be famous. And maybe I'm a traditional lady, I like all songs because that period because it takes me back to 80s and 90s and the *Intifada*. I don't like to remember the *Intifada* but I like this period.”

It was with these words that Raghda offered a list of *Intifada* songs not limited to those mentioned in Chapter 6, searching online for a few of them to sing along, a mix of bespoke *Intifada* anthems by Palestinian groups and singers, songs by Lebanese and Syrian singers, and older folk songs associated with the wedding repertoire.³²¹ Some of these songs proved difficult to get through, reminding her of the hardships of Bureij camp and of happy times with family members she hadn't seen in years; many of the songs Raghda listens to on Youtube are low quality recordings; some are even digitalised straight from cassette, with audible signs of wear and tear. An older song, Mohammad Abdel Wahhab's *My Brother Beats the Unjust* (أخي جاوز الظالمون المدي) was too much and Raghda stopped the recording. Others proving difficult included Marcel Khalife's *They Stopped Me at the Border* (وقفوني ع الحدود), which Raghda had sung in her living room on another occasion. Interestingly, Raghda's relationship to “Marcel” seemed to have changed by the time he performed in Manchester in 2016:

³²¹ While I have not focused here on Raghda's experiences of weddings, she remembers belly dancers, “men and women dancing together” and *nawar* gypsy performers as features of the Gaza weddings of her youth, along with the strong pull of Egyptian music, a theme of her own wedding in 1993.

“To be honest this time he disappointed me. I wish I didn't see him. I think now he's a material person. I asked him to sing a song for me, I'm from Palestine and I grew up with his songs, but he didn't. He only sings what he wants to sing, and he came only to sign his CD. I still love his songs but my respect for him is not as before. Before my respect was 200%, now it is 99%. [laughs]”

While listening to *They Stopped Me at the Border* was difficult at home, Raghda and her sister regretted that it wasn't part of Marcel's live setlist, along with others aimed towards the Palestinian struggle; they were also disappointed that no female singer was featured. This hints towards a circumspect view of those representing Palestine and, I will argue, a grassroots critique present in other examples of popular memory, a tradition in transmission which has at moments of crisis pushed radical voices to the fore.

It is worth reflecting on Raghda's comments on the difficulty of her and her generation in accepting “emotional music” at a time when, she implies, the situation of occupation and poverty demand that music addresses historical loss and supports anti-Zionist resistance. While this relates directly to the content and form of Palestinian musical response demanded at a grassroots level, Raghda's own reactions to the music at certain points in her Britain-based exile expressed a range of emotions, intricately associated with personal and collective remembrance. I link this process to her material experiences in Britain, jailed by the Home Office and cut off from her family by distance and through a host environment where the question of space for Palestinian narration and transmission was complex.

For Armenians in Turkey, writes Bilal, most “refer to an interruption in the transmission of familial stories. Their childhood memories of the stories of their grandparents' generations are always in fragments.” (2006, 85) Bilal sees the main reason for this interruption in the impossibility of transmitting this narrative in the public sphere, resulting in a lack of continuity, which turns “dangerous” stories into non-events. In the case of Raghda and other Palestinians subject to the British asylum system, communication in general is disrupted by acts of imprisonment and dispersal. But her comments also identify a process of generational interruption, highlighted somewhat starkly in the commercialisation or co-opting of Palestinian musicianship, contrasted with her aesthetic commitment to a music of resistance traceable back to before the *Intifada*. Her stories and songs appear fragmentary in a British context having nothing to do with “multiculturalism”.

With similarities to Gilroy's view of the experiential "sense of self" having a level of coherence in black identity (1995), memory and loss are expressed in the Armenian case in the search for lost lullabies, "in a sound, in a melody, in a movie...":

"When you are displaced from your land and culture, what you live is a feeling of longing for your own culture. This longing comes from having a significant loss shaping your subjectivity, the subjectivity of belonging to a memory and culture which are themselves displaced. The loss is not something static; it is a constitutive element in the minority experience, contributing to its reproduction." (Bilal 2006)

While the Turkish state maintains a commitment to genocide denial (Fisk 2005), the battle for recognition and preservation of *Nakba* memory in the face of Israeli denial is likewise a defining task.³²² At the same time, the tragedies, losses and victories of more recent confrontations and Israeli onslaughts have served to further the dislocation of the Palestinian people, commemorated in locations of exile in many varied cultural and political forms. (Khalili 2007; Massalha 2014; Hammer 2015) The sense of loss is compounded in times of political impasse and migration, exemplified in the way Raghda looks back on the familial solidarity of the *Intifada* and, at times, struggles with its songs today. I see this as connected to the material reality of the present period, with British/EU/US-sponsorship of the Israeli state and drive to impose a neo-colonial settlement on the Palestinians. These are cognitive results, therefore,

"in an Israeli-dictated and PA-accepted zero-sum game, wherein so-called gains for native West Bank and Gaza Palestinians must be attained at the expense of real losses on the part of the refugees and the diaspora." (Massad 2006, 128)

Yet, as Massad points out, an outcome of colonial repression is the simultaneous production of cultural and political forms outside of its control. I argued that in the case of Saied Silbak, the attempted erasure of a Palestinian heritage and normalisation of Israeli supremacy in the

³²² This is not to say that I agree with Nur Masalha's work suggesting that "peace and reconciliation [in] Palestine-Israel" is possible through a successful outcome to struggles over "signposts of memory". (2005, 51) The contributors to *Catastrophe Remembered*, edited by Masalha, are committed to a view on "peacemaking" through the symbolic righting of the wrongs of the *Nakba*, exemplified by, for example, Hilel Cohen's ignoring of second class citizenship of '48 Palestinians and faith in Israeli leaders to offer a solution with a changed "point of view." (2005, 69)

economic, political and cultural spheres has resulted in increased grassroots identification with radical Palestinian nationalist opposition. Geographical or sociohistorical interruption, therefore, can also foster certain rediscoveries,³²³ spurred on by experiential factors: “The Palestinian situation requires that we conceive of memory as a multidimensional, displaced, and local-global construction.” (Swedenburg 2003, xxix) Introducing Ramzy Baroud’s work, Pappé writes:

“Paradoxically, the biggest Zionist success of fragmenting the Palestinians into discrete groups that helped Israel to divide and rule was mitigated by the uniformity of this Palestinian experience throughout the years... it turns the Palestinian memory, oral history, and recollection into not just a register of atrocities but also tools of cultural resistance.” (Baroud 2018, x)

In his work to provide a “history from below”, Baroud calls for alternative narratives to counter those of the “fragmented” Palestinian elite, highlighting the unitary power in the stories of working class and marginalised voices. This approach echoes the folk history presented by Rosemary Sayigh, who sees a realism in the voices of present day refugees who, having no peasant upbringing to call on, display “no tendency to paint the past in unreal colours” (2007, 4); the Palestinian working class were, in any case, the backbone of the uprisings in Palestine. (Sayigh 2007, 159) Swedenburg sees “memory as resistance” in the narratives of past and present participants in these revolts which, rather than emphasising the role played by the upper classes, offered their own nationalist critique of the role played by the Palestinian leadership: “While villagers acknowledged the necessity for national unity, some saw themselves as having been more committed to it than the elite.” (2003, 112)

Musicians have engaged in this working class critique, often characterised by opposition to the compromises made by the Palestinian and Arab leadership, including the moves of a PA clique under Mahmoud Abbas.³²⁴ Massad sees in the insertion of popular songs into the political domain “as critique and intervention”, rendering “the popular internal to the political, and not

³²³ Referencing a crisis in multiculturalism, Jansen sees modernist ideas on assimilation as highly problematic. (2014)

³²⁴ Singer Basel Zayed was attacked by PA security forces for singing the satirical song *Statehood* (دولة) in response to Abbas’ push for UN recognition in of a “state” in the occupied territories in 2012. (Brehony 2014) Acts of musical opposition to Arab leaders’ subservience to imperialism include Shafiq Kabha’s opposition to Egyptian collaboration in the repression of Palestinians and Sheikh Imam’s sarcastic anthem *Tsharrafna ya Nixon Baba* (“Welcome Daddy Nixon”).

a manifestation external to it”, with a powerful impact on Palestinian and Arab popular memory and political agency. (2003, 177) Raghda’s songlist of *Intifada* artists included rough-and-ready, guerrilla-produced works which made it into the songbook of the Palestinians under occupation (see Chapter 6). In different ways, the three musicians in this thesis all offer oppositional narratives to those pursued by elites, having no illusions in either the failed process of negotiations or, on the other hand, of the contemporary mainstream in Palestinian music making.

In Raghda’s case, remembrance of the “old songs” of the pre-Oslo years help her to frame this critique, but it also seems instructive to reverse this formula and say that criticism of the status quo is a window through which to remember a time of insurgency, when “people loved each other”, and when she could be involved as a young girl through the act of singing. But how does this help Raghda confront the obstacles she faces today? And does the unifying tendency of working class critique identified by Baroud overcome the interruption to narratives of the oppressed seen in Bilal’s work on the Armenian case? It may be useful at this point to widen the definition of Palestinian memory and commemoration to return to a theme of the first chapter in this thesis on *sumud*/steadfastness, discussed in connection to Palestinian refugees in Kuwait. Drawing on Khalili, I saw *sumud* as both an active and passive process, as a framework for Palestinians to maintain nationalist consciousness in conditions of exile and to transcend the tendencies of colonial ethnic cleansing towards erasure or defeat. Put differently:

“the efficacy of *sumud* is not in its ability to beget political cataclysms, but rather in its cumulative force over decades resulting in incremental changes, which may not substantially alter societies, but which provide a breathing space for those who are most often trampled in the stampede of history.” (Khalili 2007, 225)

Reflecting on the contribution of Raghda on the role of music during her time in Gaza and Britain, it seems clear that experiences of war, resistance, marginalisation and imprisonment have strengthened her consciousness towards a musical narrative that promotes radical opposition to these conditions. She needed music to “cope with society”, and embedded in this practice was a commitment to the reproduction of narratives of both *sumud* and resistance, responding to a position of disempowerment by continuing to traverse the bridge between Manchester and Palestine. This consciousness was shaped in and around the *Intifada* and Raghda seeks to overcome the dislocation of exile through her relationship to music. Although there are similarities in exilic or “subaltern” experiences of Trinidadians (Miller and Slater

2000), Kurds (Eriksen 2006), Tamils (Enteen 2006) and Armenians (Bilal 2006), Aouragh suggests that there are differences:

“The Palestinian national identity is exceptional insofar as, besides the level of narrative and visual representations, the actual existence of Palestinians is embedded in colonialism and anti-colonial struggle. Their armed struggles provided a political impulse for the evolution of Palestinian national identity.” (2012, 44)

Where the practices of these oppressed groups may overlap is in their vision of liberation, with music often central to the story:

“In Kurdish culture this is democratic dance – the leading places are taken by the young and vigorous, but further down the line come the elderly, the infirm, the children. Men and women dance joyously and proudly together. For many, this is an image of a potentially liberated Kurdistan.” (Emery 2015)

In Britain, remembering Palestine, holding fast to Gaza as an undefeated landscape in the face of Israeli colonisation, Raghda *felt* the music: “It made you think about revolution.”

8.3 Transmission: music and the future

*“I sang all the singers in the world to Motaz. Because it was for me an opportunity. [If you're] from Gaza, if you need something to keep you busy, you sing. Sometimes and it was not too many times, I'd sing when he was sleeping.”*³²⁵

“I like to sing when I'm doing something, when I'm busy with something. Ibrahim is the most important thing to keep me busy all the time, so it means that I'm singing all the time. I was very happy. Happy, happy, happy. I sing Fairuz and songs for children. While he sleeps I sing Umm Kulthum, Julia Boutros, Wael Kfoury, Shirin, Asalah, nice songs that make me feel happy and express my feelings. When I sing them I feel more comfortable than before. So Ibrahim is a gift from God, because he makes me sing all the time.”

³²⁵ Interview in Manchester, 6 April 2016.

Building on the previous sections in this chapter, and on some of the stories of childhood and exile presented earlier in the thesis, I will conclude this case study with a brief focus on Raghda's singing habits around children. In Britain, the site of her reflections on childhood and habits in Gaza, such memories are revealing of the role played by a working class Palestinian woman in the transmission of narratives of resistance and *sumud*, looking towards the future with optimism for music and liberation.

Reflecting on her own childhood, music illuminated her memories as something exciting, collective, inclusive, and a way of connecting to her nationhood. Working as a therapist for other women in early adulthood – shortly after her own marriage ordeal – Raghda herself became the voice of transmission, combining songs of love and betrayal with narratives of revolutionary nationalism. From war to a British immigration prison, her relationship to music fluctuated during the years of seeking asylum, playing a role, as I have argued, of coming to terms with exile and maintaining connections to Palestine through songs woven through her upbringing in Bureij. Now, with the London birth of her nephew, Ibrahim, frustration turned to ecstatic elation, a new reason to sing, a source of light amidst Britain's inhospitable grey.

Singing to babies is a part of life, Raghda says, and one she shares with other family members:

“It's our habit, even in Gaza. We are, all the time, singing to them. So when I went along to London one week ago... We have a new baby Ibrahim, I love him *so* much! And when I look at him I feel like someone is asking me to sing. So I sing all the time and when I start to sing he sleeps. And me too! [laughs]”

“I did this when Moataz was little, and my nephews, and even my mum had this habit, singing to our children. Not all Palestinian families do this, but my family do it all the time. So, maybe because we like music and we like to sing... children take you to another side of this life; we feel that children are pure and clean. They encourage you to sing.”

Hinting at shared benefits for the singer and child, Raghda says she chooses “nice songs that make me feel happy and express my feelings”. Some of these come from a repertoire already mentioned, with numbers sung by Umm Kulthum, Duraid Lahaam, Julia Boutros, Shireen and more recent artists such as Lebanese singer Wfael Khoury. But, in response to my question about whether it matters what the song is about, Raghda immediately lists Palestinian songs

from the national *turath* and the days of the *Intifada*. In her flat in Manchester, with Ibrahim and his mother Awatif up visiting, the sisters join in together, taking it in turns to initiate the song, and with ‘*Al-Raba’iyyeh*’ a particular favourite:

‘Al-raba’iyyeh, ‘al-raba’iyyeh

We don’t sleep when we’re oppressed

عالباعية عالباعية
واحنا ما بنام عالبغوية

The music is accredited to Iraqi actor and musician Kan’an Wadfi, with lyrics composed in colloquial Arabic by Palestinian poet and leading PLO member Said al-Muzayin, who lived in Gaza after the *Nakba*. ‘*Al-Raba’iyyeh*’ exists, much like other folk songs, in many different versions. Scrolling through internet searches, Raghda struggled to find the song with “the right lyrics”, among seemingly hundreds of arrangements, from keyboard-*dabke* to grainy recordings featuring choruses of men with deep voices; some had also altered the melody from the version she recognised. She also wanted to translate the title, which loosely means “the four”, but complained that all that came up was Tony Blair and Middle East “peace” deals. It’s simple refrain, based around three notes of *maqam bayati*, mark it out as being pliable for interpretation, with lyrics composed in dedication to new uprisings.³²⁶ *Oud* player Reem Anbar associates the song with old ladies in Gaza, “older than my grandma”, but says young Palestinians also dance *dabke* to it; I asked English teacher Duaa Ahmed if she associates it with anything and she gave a one word answer: “Victory.”³²⁷ Its simplicity explains its popularity and Raghda compares it favourably to other “sad songs”:

“a nice song, when you get out of jail...”³²⁸

With Ibrahim, she also sings *kano thulath rijal* and the folk song *al-rozana*, with connections to the wider Bilad al-Sham region.³²⁹ When asked if her son Motaz knows this material, she seems quite sure:

³²⁶ An arrangement of ‘*Al-Raba’iyyeh*’ was recorded for the 1988 release *Music of the Intifada* by a group named as In A’d Rifaki. Its chorus changes the lyrics above to “my country’s flag is Palestinian”, and calls on *kuffiyeh*-wearing youth to rise up fearlessly.

³²⁷ Conversations with the author, March 2018.

³²⁸ Interview in Manchester, 20 May 2016.

³²⁹ *Al-Rozana* reportedly tells the story in Ottoman times of an Italian ship docking in Lebanon during a famine, carrying a broken promise of food. Bandar Khalil explains: “With this genuine Arabic song, many questions arise in the mind of the genuine Arab. For example, how many of our people have had all of their rosy dreams

“No he doesn't know them. He knows Assaf songs and songs from the last 10 years. But those songs are very old, from the 80s and before. *'Al-Raba'iyeh*, yes, but *Kano Thulath Rijal*, no, it's from our generation.”

Raghda's insistence took me back to a year or so before when, in a cramped bedroom in cramped migrant house in Longsight, I'd hung out with Motaz and his friend Ahmed, also from Gaza, in what was a particularly “Palestinian” listening session around Ahmed's laptop. They argued over whether listening to Mais Shalash³³⁰ or other more religious presentations of Palestinian resistance was a betrayal of their *jabha* (PFLP) politics and both seemed to like the Sabreen songs I played on my turn. But Raghda's comments made me think in particular of the two friends' mutual love for Al-‘Ashiqeen, and the grainy, cassette-like qualities to the group's songs in Ahmed's mp3 list. The band was also mentioned in my interview with Mohammad Assaf and, while may be flippant to credit the mothers of these *Gazzawi shabab* (youths) with responsibility for these pre-*Intifada* tastes, these exile hangouts were revealing of the role this music continues to play, and provoked questions of how it reached the youth. Motaz had his own awareness and impulses but knowledge of the material mentioned by Raghda in the 80s is unmistakable. For her part, her son's love of singing comes quite directly from his upbringing:

“It's because of me, because of my family and because of my country. In my country we didn't have lots of things to express our feelings, so we find that music is the best way to breathe and talk and interpret our feelings.”

It would also become apparent that Motaz did know *Kano Thulath Rijal*, suggesting that he either learned it from other family or friends, through his own research, or from his mother despite her recollections to the contrary; the fact that she also sang the song in front of

met with dark disappointment, and all their hopes were squandered on an endless range of despair, frustration and helplessness? How many of us have waited and were patient and bore all of the their pain, only to find that when our Rosanna came and dropped anchor in the harbor of their dreams, nothing came out of it... We as an Arab people that has spent its whole life waiting for numerous “Rosannas” which still have never arrived, while carrying further disappointment for our dreams, how many times must we hear this song each day?” (Arabicmusictranslation.com 2009)

³³⁰ McDonald met the young singer during his research: “Distanced from a home and homeland that she has been raised to covet, and yet has never experienced, Mais Shalash assumed that she would one day marry and raise a family in Palestine. Over the course of our initial interviews I would often ask her, ‘What do you plan to do if and when you are ever able to return to Jaffa?’ Without variation she would answer unequivocally, ‘I'll sing, of course!’” (2013, 162)

Ibrahim hinted at the latter. Raghda marked the song out as encompassing feelings of sadness around the execution of the “three stars” (see Chapter 7), seeing *’Al-Raba’iyyeh* as being celebratory in comparison and, by her own admission, more suited to singing with children.

In the sections above, a seeming rejection of “emotional music” and affinity for narratives of resistance and *sumud* was juxtaposed with “coping with society” and, with baby Ibrahim, she would talk about continuing “our habit” of singing to children. For Raghda, this involved music of differing styles, whether associated with rural Palestine or the slick studios of Lebanon and Egypt. But it also encompassed a spectrum of feelings and emotions, mediated through the demands of Palestinian nationalism or, as in the days of the Women’s Empowerment Project, through themes of love, betrayal and the ability to overcome. Perhaps this wasn’t a contradiction at all in her transmission of the seemingly conflicting notions of love and *Intifada* – as she had said earlier, Palestinians of her generation often demand that music addresses the national struggle, but they also make exceptions, as the enduring popularity of Umm Kalthum shows.³³¹ Raghda’s view that this music has revolutionary qualities is highlighted, perhaps, in the ability of performance to fuel the public interpretation of collective and personal feelings (Shay 1999), as well as for non-public forms of commemoration, linked to the wellbeing of children and adults. On an individual level, her interaction with Ahmad Qaabour pointed to the emotional and communal relationships embodied in songs of resistance. And Raghda herself had become a source of narration.

Singing has been central to the processes of building and maintaining Palestinian consciousness in widespread locations and a central thread of this thesis has looked to the role of music in carrying narratives of anti-colonial spirit and progressive nationalism in locations where space has to be found under colonial conditions. In Chapter 3, I viewed *sumud* as inherent in the temporary existence of the Kuwait-based exiles and pointed to the pivotal role played by women in bringing national folklore to new generations. I argued that Reem Kelani had herself played a role in untying wedding music from a specific time and place and had brought it into a new context. Yet, in the *ghorba*, the winds blowing to and from Palestine remain strong, for Reem, Saied, Raghda and many other Palestinian exiles. All experienced music in differing ways in their family upbringings, intertwined with stories and legends of the homeland.

³³¹ Young *Gazzawi oud* players such as Reem Anbar and Mohammed Ballour continue to study Umm Kalthum songs and other classic Arab material.

A range of writers have seen the family and home as a site of oral transmission and the development of consciousness and identity. (Bilal 2006; Slymovics 1998; Seramatakis 1991) Researching Palestinian storytelling, Sirhan observes a wider field:

“The family is a fundamental institution in the Arab world and it is therefore unsurprising that the family setting is of the utmost importance in oral narratives. Indeed, the transmission of many oral narratives first takes place in the family domain and, from there, spreads outwards.” (2014, 45)

Turning Sirhan’s phrase, it could also be observed that, in broad examples included in the narratives of Raghda and the other two musicians, oral narratives spread “inwards” at crucial historic moments – for, after all, experience also happens “out there”; Raghda’s revolution for singing at home challenged her mother’s fears of local embarrassment at a time when Palestinian youths were demanding change on the streets. Yet her early years, like Saied’s and Reem’s, offered a glimpse into popular history, the *Nakba* and the exilic condition endured by their parents, narrated in word and in song by mothers, fathers and older family members. Raghda’s family setting brought the *Intifada* home and explained current events through its place as primary site of transmission. For Raghda, Al-Qubeiba is still “my village”, despite only seeing it with her own eyes during that fleeting visit in her pre-teens, and her memories are graphic, whether of the tangible scent the land or her father’s oral projection of pre-*Nakba* life. As Khalili writes in connection to the refugees in Lebanon:

“one of the primary tropes of Palestinian commemoration is the insistence on intergenerational transmission of memory through spontaneous telling of stories to children and grandchildren by the elders” (2007, 60)

The Palestinian experience suggests the heightened importance of narratives in cases of colonial oppression and ethnic cleansing and, as Khalili writes, all acts of commemoration contain stories. While the focus of these phrases is on public acts, I argue that the narratives of cohesion and struggle present in these stories are woven through the interplay of events commemorated within and externally to the confines of home life. Familial presentations of the *Nakba*, *Naksa*, *Intifada*, Oslo, tragedies, offensives and betrayals, are given a soundtrack

through the spontaneous acts of singing, with a formative influence on the young, comparable, to some extent, to experiences of national traditions in food, a sub-plot of all of the case studies. Does this suggest that music is just one of many strands of narrative or commemoration? Although focusing on the power of the spoken word in Palestinian culture, Sirhan reminds us that, “defining folklore is no simple task. It cannot simply be based on its form of transmission.” (2014, 40) It is beyond the scope of this thesis to arrive at a definition, but Sirhan’s observations suggests questions about musical form, perhaps compounded by the approaches to instrumental and vocal music already discussed. In Raghda’s case, is folklore encompassed in the wedding songs of a *zajjal*, or by an 80s-era Julia Boutros, shoulderpads and all? Both examples coexist in Raghda’s repertoire of lullabies and nursery rhymes, further evidence that the “diasporic” Palestinian family frequently brings in cosmopolitan tastes in music and wider culture, whether consciously or accidentally, exposing children to the popular cultures of the place of exile. (Suleiman 2017; Baroud 2018) Beyond the repertoire of family singing, Raghda’s nephew Ibrahim is exposed to Bollywood TV while playing with toys in his aunt’s living room.

It is the singing itself, however, that offers a mode of understanding Palestinian history and statelessness, providing an emotional outlet and overcoming the sense of isolation of living in a racist and discriminatory environment. In another context, Bilal writes:

“Armenian mothers’ and grandmothers’ lullabies tell the forbidden stories of Armenian presence in Anatolia and of the violent extermination of that presence. These lullabies stand on the margins of Turkish National History.” (2006, 69)

Bilal hints at the changing face of transmission for Armenians in Turkey and discusses the studio-isation of lullabies, altering connotations and references to loss, and marking a shift from habits of bodily connection in singing to children.³³² The marginalisation of Kurds by the Turkish state and its ruling ideology pushes collective practices to the margins and prompts communities to find alternative strategies and methods for maintaining their cultural and political existence alongside a struggle for independence. (Letsch 2017) In Britain, migrants – and particularly refugees – suffer the characteristics of a political, economic and cultural apartheid. It has been noted that Palestinian youth become increasingly conscious of their

³³² Looking at the physical closeness of mothers/grandmothers and babies in the singing of improvised lullabies, Bilal writes that the “most important” change in the period of commercially recorded lullabies is that they are “not transmitted through a bodily, intimate and sensual relationship.” (2006) In the course of these changes, meaning and memory are radically transformed.

national identity in countries where ruling ideology means official support for Israel and meeting Motaz and his friend Ahmed on demonstrations in Britain is suggestive that this is the case here too. (Baroud 2018; Hammer 2005)

To Raghda, Motaz's pride in being Palestinian means that her work is bearing fruit:

“I feel very happy when I see my son singing near me... He also dances *dabke sha'biyyeh* and this is good. If he will sing our songs, Palestinian songs, plus *dabke*, he will present our country, our land, our history. Especially in the UK... I'd feel happy if he was a famous singer, but [I'd feel happy] even if he sang in the street.”³³³

With these conversation, Raghda expresses hope that her message has reached a new generation, and that the Palestinian narrative will reverberate in the next, with two decades between Motaz and Ibrahim. In her life so far, songs have carried stories of resistance and *sumud*, acting as mediators of human emotion in hard times, a way to escape marginalisation or a bridge to involvement in physical acts of resistance. Parents, grandparents and siblings all brought Palestine to life through musical narratives, building consciousness and a sense of justice. As a Palestinian refugee woman, Raghda has placed herself in a role of leadership in the eyes of other women, friends and family, singing for empowerment and using questions of performance as a method of grassroots critique towards the leadership of the national liberation struggle. To her, the possibilities are endless:

“Music is important for resistance, for life, for your time, for your family, for many things. Music is the language of everything. This is what I think.”

³³³ Interview in Manchester, 1 June 2014.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

Music, transmission and exile: Palestinian stories and revolution

“It is as if the activity of repeating prevents us, and others, from skipping us or overlooking us entirely.” (Edward Said, *After the Last Sky*, 1986)

The research carried out for this project focused on three Palestinian musicians with very different life stories, upbringings and exile journeys. Beginning by recognising Reem, Saied and Raghda as skilled oral historians, presenting representations of Palestine through artistic means, I have sought to balance their narratives with critical ethnography and a thorough examination of historical and wider literatures. In this section, I offer some final reflections on the case studies, returning to the themes outlined at the beginning of this thesis, and drawing out what I see as its key arguments.

Palestinian music: between cosmopolitanism and turath

Keeping in mind a focus on oral tradition that has, for the most part, characterised the study of Palestinian music (see Chapter 1), I see the central notions of *taqlid* (tradition) and *turath* (heritage) as enduring influences in the national music scene, wherever it is to be found. Conceptualisations of pastness are more openly expressed in the performances of El Funoun, Reem Kelani, or the late vocalists Shafiq Kabha and Rim Banna, as “keeping alive” or maintaining Palestinian folk traditions in music. But such themes also remain present with Issa Boulos, Christine Zayed, Saied Silbak and others musicians engaged in instrumental performance. The *turath* is even evoked by Palestinian hip hop artists, drawing on orally transmitted tales and presenting themselves in roles comparable to the archetypal *zajjal* poet-singer. (Safieh 2013) During the interviews, Reem, Saied and Raghda referenced musical heritage in different ways, through descriptions of weddings, the traditional site of Palestinian

music and oral culture, in events organised by the nationalist movement, or in the home, remembering specific songs forms, with some crossover between the three.

Central to the story, I have argued, is the concept of a historic cosmopolitanism hinted at by Kanaaneh and Bursheh (both 2013), by Jalal's research on pre-*Nakba* composers,³³⁴ or in the memoirs of Jawhariyyeh (2014), namely that Palestinian music has always been made up of diverse constitutive elements, whether from Armenian and Greek migrants in the Ottoman times, or of the cultural exposure of Arab youth in 21st Century Europe. I add that the catastrophes suffered by Palestinians before, during, and since the *Nakba* have accelerated this process, as forced migration and exilic experiences of Palestinians, whether in Kuwait, Manchester, Gaza, or among the internally displaced, have brought with them a high degree of exposure to diverse "outside" influences. To paraphrase Massad (2001), colonialism is the catalyst in a dialectical process which is both repressive and productive of musical ideas and plaforms.

If there are certain unities of experience in the exile condition, in origins in historic Palestine, in the facts of being geographically scattered, and in ongoing commitments to a national cause (Baroud 2018), the experiences of those in the *ghorba/shatat* often differ greatly. The social connections between Palestinians in Britain, for instance, range from friendship and solidarity, to the economic exploitation of proletarianised refugees by wealthier "community" members.³³⁵ It follows that the "dispersed national community" described by Said (1999) experiences the *ghorba* differently according to locations of exile, but also by class position, and a range of other factors shaping life under colonial relations. With Kuwait, for example, I have highlighted the perceived differences in wedding experience between those attending the workers' club and the professional class to which Reem's parents belonged. Though no less Palestinian, it meant that her experience was different, as were her musical stories. There were clear contrasts to be drawn between all of the locations discussed in this thesis. Gaza, isolated from historic Palestine, bombed frequently and strangled by blockade, has arguably suffered the harshest consequences of Israel's presence. Furthermore, and comparable to the region's linguistic conservatism (Sirhan 2014, 88), Gaza did not have anywhere near the kind of

³³⁴ Interview in Ramallah, August 2013.

³³⁵ In discussions I had with restaurant workers in Manchester and London in early 2019, anger and frustration was voiced at long shifts, poor conditions and rates of pay set below the minimum wage, as Palestinians arriving as refugees from Gaza held insecure and exploitative jobs under Palestinian bosses in Britain.

exposure to transatlantic cultural produce as did Kuwait or Shafa'amr³³⁶; it didn't even have pianos (see Chapter 6). There may be an argument, therefore, for seeing revolutionary, resistance-based song as having starker relevance, or more direct origins, in these conditions. "Cosmopolitan" sounds came second hand, through the works of Lebanese and Syrian musicians (see Chapter 7).

Questions remain over the extent to which Palestinian musicians are able to overcome or challenge the obstacles placed by Zionist colonialism, "globalisation", and the monopolisation of material, economic and cultural resources in the hands of those opposed to Palestinian narratives and practices of resistance. (Kannaneh 2013) I argue that Reem, Saied and Raghda, and to a large extent, their families, friendship groups or localised communities, have met these challenges in different ways. As suggested previously, the multifarious exposure of the musicians in different locations led me to reject a singular form-based concept of Palestinian music, such as a focus on *thawri* (revolutionary) music, wedding song or hip hop. The decision instead to emphasise plural cosmopolitan experiences seemed obvious when the broadness of musical, literary and experiential material became clearer.

Nevertheless, there were themes that tied the experiences together, and perhaps none so clearly as the role of Fairuz/Rahbani Brothers music in the upbringings of all three musicians. The universality of this iconic figure³³⁷ is seen in other Palestinian accounts (Baroud 2018; Suleiman 2016) as Fairuz and the Palestinians embraced each other. Analysing this unifying influence pointed the way to assessing the impact of other non-Palestinians on the social soundworlds of the three. Her appropriation by Palestinians is thought provoking when such diverse figures as Mungo Jerry and Julia Boutros are thrown into the mix. Yet, as reflections on Marcel Khalife suggested, this loyalty was not unconditional, and in highly politicised times, depended to some extent on the musicians' public solidarity with the Palestinian cause (see Chapter 8).

³³⁶ Raghda recalls that, until recently, Gaza could access two TV channels: "Egypt 1, Egypt 2 and Israel". Her sister Awatif thinks that West Bankers may have had more access to Syrian and Jordanian TV. (Interview in Manchester, 6 April 2016)

³³⁷ Yasin Rifa'iyya's short story *The Hallway*, set in Beirut, describes a tight-knit Palestinian group: "They met morning and evening, and paid the same taxes, and watched the same television programs. They all loved Fairuz, Wadie al-Saafi, 'Abd al-Wahhab, and Umm Kulthum. They spoke the same dialect of the same language, tried to outshine one another with their cars, attended the same soccer matches." (Jayyusi 2005)

Notable in this discussion of cosmopolitan influences on the lives of the exiles is that, at a certain point, this championing of the cause by famous non-Palestinian musicians was not enough. This truth is expressed in the search of Raghda for “Palestinian singers”, in Saied’s extensions of *tarab*, or in Reem’s quest to learn from the mouths of women refugees. Yet all of them continued to embrace sounds from beyond – whether Kuwaiti *sawt*, Indian music or European jazz. In this context, I see Singh’s line of question as thought provoking, when in discussing developments in the Punjab and India, he asked whether the diaspora is “the leading actor”, or “a weathervane responding to developments” back home. (1999) In the Palestinian case, I argue that there are more than two directions to consider, particularly if we see the Palestinian context as radicalising a section of Lebanese and Syrian musicians (Chapter 7); it is probably outside of the scope of this thesis to ask whether Palestine has therefore “cosmopolitanised” the artists of these countries. For Reem, Saied and Raghda, conditions of exile or being marginalised led to politicisation and towards a search for Palestinian forms of musical expression, whether in suggesting *za‘atar w zeit* qualities of maternal transmission, or by propelling a separation with the Israeli industry, or through a lasting attachment to revolutionary *Intifada* anthems.

The musical forms taken in the transmission of Palestinian narratives are therefore difficult to pin down to singular approaches to style or presentation. The range of influences present in contemporary and recent music making point to multiple cosmopolitan sound worlds, social contexts and, wider regional and international relationships. Referencing Edward Said, I arguably moved away from a definition of transmission as an ethnomusicological category for “passing down” musical ideas (Chapter 1), towards the social history, memory and orality which has, in many ways, been the life blood of exiled Palestinian communities since 1948. (Feldman 2006) Yet music may be seen as the social act common to the accounts given in the case studies. Discussions on first contact with music often brought in history and politics but thought processes also appeared to flow in the opposite direction: Reem remembered the *Intifada* for the cultural renaissance it brought to Palestinians in Kuwait; Raghda shaped her narrative of the Oslo years around singing for divorced women; Saied traces his political consciousness to teenage musical relationships. The act of talking about music and politics is dialogic and multi-directional, much like the music itself.

Colonialism, censorship, erasure and space

Paraphrasing Khalidi, Julianne Hammer evokes the frustrations of Palestinians towards public representations of the Middle East: “Israelis always have to be heard when a Palestinian voice is aired, while the reverse is not true.” (2005, 24) The discussion in question looked to political and mainstream views of the Palestinian people, with particular reference to the media mouthpieces of Europe and the US. Reem reflects on her own journey through the “world music” industry, where the presence of Israeli musicians in festival programmes serves to “justify my presence”. (Kelani 2016) For Saied, coexistence-focused projects were formative towards an understanding of Palestinian consciousness, rejecting calls by Zionist ethnomusicologist Brinner for the *good Arab musician* willing conform to Israeli cultural supremacy. (2009)

Broadly speaking, conditions of separation, war, resistance, subservience, conservatism, apartheid and imprisonment have impacted immeasurably on the musical expressiveness of the participants in this thesis. Raghda, for one, lived in monumental times, characterised by a coming of age during the uprising, a period she remembers fondly for familial warmth and musical solidarity amidst the social upheaval. The situation impacted upon the very foundation of music making for Palestinians in the local area, with the blossoming of guerrilla recordings and *Intifada* anthems. With no state funding or functioning music business, Raghda witnessed grassroots musicians taking things into their own hands. Herself a part of the “generation of stones” – the first line of defence for Palestinian youths – Raghda was able to find “diamonds”, precious cassettes which enabled her involvement. Shortly after, music took on a different role for her, used in therapy towards other divorced or abused women. Narrating discussions of an encroaching conservatism, I argued that the NGOisation of the Occupied Territories pushed this music to the margins. Nevertheless, she could wield it in other ways.

In the urban environments of Kuwait and Shefa‘amr, questions of erasure and expression took on different forms. In the former, Palestinians were in a unique period given space to promote political and cultural narratives that opposed the Israeli state – the erstwhile location of Saied’s hometown, where such open expression was less a possibility. Massalha puts city locations to the test, asking:

“If cities are civilisation and incubators of advanced culture and sites where people can be

public and visible, creative and contesting, where human agency has the potential to be fulfilled, where social movements, subcultures and countercultures have the potential to emerge and become visible, where politics and collective forms of art flourish and prosper and where the substantive nature of democratic citizenship is tested and materialised; and if material public space is a prerequisite for the materialisation of public life and is both indicative and an indispensable component of the democratic nature of society; if urban life, as Lefebvre (1996) argues, is an indicator and a gauge against which the development of society is measured and depriving people of the urban means depriving them of civilisation, the questions we must ask become: what can be made of Palestinian cities inside Israel?" (2014, 27)

If Shefa'amr, and indeed Gaza or Kuwait fell short of providing the nurture needed for music to be performed in conditions of democracy and substantive participation, what can also be said is that musicians and community members have nevertheless found space for grassroots expression in music and political struggle, even if the periods to do so with high productivity were short lived.

In London and Manchester, I suggest that there are other forces at play that need special mention. As described in chapters on Reem and, painfully so with Raghda, "multiculturalism" policies were a smokescreen for tighter immigration controls, imprisonment, destitution and/or deportation. The profit-driven "world music" scene did not and could not challenge the ruling ideology. These were the cultural realities of a "domestic neocolonialism" (Sivanandan 1976; 1991), or an immigration system set up to defend the economic needs of imperialism. (Jameson 2015) Concerts at the height of Palestine solidarity on the streets presented alternative platforms and audiences (Chapter 5).

Run through the Home Office system, Raghda saw music as a "boyfriend", therapy and, I argued, a way to remember and reconnect with Palestine. But what has performing in Britain meant for Reem and Saied? The first case study looked at the continuing role of women in transmitting Palestinian narratives through music, and Reem's mission is set on finding the space to do precisely that. In doing so she marks herself out as a "big mama", comparable to those refugee camp women who are central characters in her stage introductions. Many of the obstacles she refers to in the music industry are, I argue, expressive of the economic and political realities described above and experienced differently by Raghda. Political environments and industry trends are linked to political realities which keep the "P word" away

from record deals. For Saied, studying in Britain, conversation looked forwards to rebuilding a musical presence back home. It was also a way to (temporarily) escape the Israeli cultural establishment and sharpen his skills before re-intervening. But, in boycotting Zionist institutions and artists, and likely unwelcome at the Israeli table anyway, the question arose of where and what Saied could intervene in upon his return. This story is still being written.

Social movement, national liberation and revolutions in music

On 9 August 2018, Israel bombed and completely destroyed the Said al-Mishal Centre for Culture and Sciences in Gaza City. For many young Palestinians living in Gaza, suffering chronic unemployment and worsening economic sanctions, the building had been a lifeline, as a space for dance, music, theatre and poetry. Its demolition prompted an outpouring of memories in videos and articles from Palestinians in Gaza and abroad, with some promising to perform in the street if the occupation took away their concert halls. (Anbar 2018; Asad 2018) Within hours, the band Awtar al-Shara‘a (“Strings of the Street”)³³⁸ had set up a sound system in the rubble, singing patriotic songs, surrounded by a large crowd of onlookers.³³⁹ From the makeshift concert, an online video of their version of *Muqawem* (“Resistance”), sung by Julia Boutros in the wake of the Hizbullah victory over Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in July-August 2006³⁴⁰, was accessed over 95,000 times. Echoing the themes of Boutros’ earlier *Ghabit Shams al-Haqq*, remembered by Raghda as a song from the *Intifada* (Chapter 7), *Muqawem* spoke of the “south”, “standing up to resist” in “the land of massacres.” A narrative wielded by new voices in a different time and place.

It could be argued that the musicians who gathered to perform among the debris of the Said al-Mashal voiced resistance but performed *sumud*. The act of performing where the centre had stood just hours before could be interpreted as the very definition of steadfastness. As I have been circumspect to categorise genres of musicianship, I do not attempt to label narratives definitively or categorically “as resistance” or “as *sumud*”, and see accounts as often overlapping. Raghda reports listening to *Intifada*-era songs in Manchester, at different points,

³³⁸ Awtar al-Shara‘a had played at the Said al-Mashal Centre when it had remained standing.

³³⁹ Other musicians performing in the rubble included members of the Egyptian group Devavin, who performed *Bektub Ismik ya Biladi* (see Chapter 7) in front of children, who danced and clapped along. (Andalou Agency video, 16 August 2018.)

³⁴⁰ The lyrics to *Muqawem* were written by Hizbullah leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah.

referencing their use for remembering and “coping”. In the intertwining of memory and resistance with romantic versions of village histories, I have attempted to report and critique, rather than present the musicians’ views as my own. At the same time, I have rejected views that suggest resistance has outlived its usefulness as a category of analysis (McDonald 2013; Salih and Richter-Devroe 2014), seeing such narratives as expressing power relationships and as having continuing relevance to the experience of those on the sharp end of national oppression (Chapter 1). With Kanafani (1972), I further argue that intellectuals and artists are central players in resistance movements, voicing popular demands and critical commentaries at key junctures in Palestinian history.

As suggested in Raghda’s post-Oslo account, or in the fact that the families of all three had been separated from their land in the *Nakba*, the notion of tragedy often ran counterpoint to other narrative plots. This sense of loss and dispossession has shaped countless Palestinian narratives, yet I did not find within my ethnographic analysis narratives comparable to those of defeat and victimhood described by Khalili as so attractive towards international donors or lacking in the hopefulness implicit in *sumud* forms of commemoration. (2007, 101) By contrast, the heroic form characterising Khalili’s third category was instructive towards Saied’s reporting of his grandfather’s *Nakba* story. More often than not, grassroots critique took on the form of narratives of resistance and *sumud*. While none of the musicians professed membership of a Palestinian organisation or acted as a political activist in the traditional sense, they nevertheless expressed notions of support for “on the ground”³⁴¹ resistance to Zionism, and occasionally took to the streets in protest themselves.

I have sought at various points in this thesis to consider to what extent the future of Palestinian musicians and music hinges on the fate of the national movement. As Stein and Swedenburg write:

“More often than not, the relative importance of culture is directly proportional to its perceived ability to reflect, serve, and exemplify the political, either in the instrumental service of hegemony deployed as a weapon in political struggles.” (2005, 5)

³⁴¹ Interview with Reem Kelani, London, 27 July 2016.

Are musical contributions, therefore, destined to rise, fall, and regenerate with the shuddering of time? While it lies beyond this thesis to definitively answer such questions, I have attempted, in analysing the relationship of a music of the oppressed to colonial power, to raise questions on ability of those who perform and experience it to challenge the root cause of this oppression.

I have argued, with reference to Turino's concepts of nationalism and cosmopolitanism (2000), and with Raghda's complaints on the lack of priority ascribed to music by the Palestinian leadership, that this process is linked to the goal of national liberation movements for independence and sovereignty. Moreover, as the unaddressed goal of the return of Palestinian refugees remains outside of the agenda of the national leadership, the current PA negotiating tactic of demanding a UN-recognised "state" on any portion of the West Bank it can hold onto is open to challenge, as Basel Zayed's musical intervention in 2012 showed. The broader context encompasses a crisis in the leadership of the Palestinian liberation movement (Baroud 2017), identified in musical responses to the post-Oslo period. (El-Ghadban and Strohm 2013)

In the final case study, I situated Raghda's calls for a musical and social revolution within a tradition of grassroots criticism of bourgeois leadership. (Sayigh 2007; Swedenburg 2003) Such oppositional narratives are observed in all three of the musicians and represents a stand, I argue, linked to the struggles of space for musical transmission. That their voices stand outside of the mainstream points to the potential for the revival, renewal and rebuilding of the liberation movement, the likes of which were experienced by Raghda in Gaza during the *Intifada*, or sown in the *al-Hadaf* project, referenced in connection to the social movement in the *dakhil*. (Massalha 2014) As in Latin America, referenced briefly in Chapter 6, alternative platforms to music are linked to demands for social justice. Or, as Wong suggests, music is "emblematic" of potential alternatives. (2009) For many in the recent period, this has meant finding ways to challenge normalised spaces and pro-Zionist monopolies. Music is critical as Palestinian musicians continue to imagine the future.

Interviews

With Reem Kelani, Saied Silbak and Raghda

Reem Kelani, 1 July 2016, London.

Reem Kelani, 27 July 2016, London.

Reem Kelani, 9 December 2017, London.

Saied Silbak, October 2015, London.

Saied Silbak, 29 May 2016, London.

Raghda, June 2014, Manchester.

Raghda, 29 April 2015, Manchester.

Raghda, 29 May 2015, Manchester.

Raghda, 10 June 2015, Manchester.

Raghda, 6 April 2016, Manchester.

Additional interviews

Nader Jalal, August 2013, Ramallah.

Said Murad, August 2013, Jerusalem.

Reem Talhami, August 2013, Jerusalem.

Basel Zayed, August 2013, Ramallah.

Mohammed Assaf, 28 November 2014, London.

Maysa Daw, 7 November 2014, Manchester.

Tamer Nafar, 7 November 2014, Manchester.

Tamer Abu Ghazaleh, 16 April 2016, Manchester.

Ruba Shamshoum, 12 March 2016, London.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTL1twYajy8>

Ya Zareef et-Tool (يا ظريف الطول). “Oh Tall, Handsome Man” [Traditional]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-oa-6hnhkce&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Ataaba (عتابا). [Traditional]

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Dal’ouna (ع لدلعونة). [Traditional]

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Bilhana Yam il-Hana (بالهنا يم الهنا). [Traditional]

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Ballah Tsubbu Hal-'Ahweh (بالله تصبوا هالفهوة). “By Allah, Pour out that Coffee”

[Traditional] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_vNeKSgS0o

Til’at, Ya Mahla Nurha (بالله تصبوا هالفهوة). “It Has Risen, How Beautiful is its Light”

[Traditional/Sayyid Darwish]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0xNNvevqv0&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Marmar Zamani (مرمر زماني). “He has Embittered my Life” [Traditional]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMutLQo7G-M&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Ya Halali Ya Mali (يا حلالي يا مالي). “You are Mine by Right” [Traditional refrain]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj2hygKoe14&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Zahrat al-Mada’in (زهرة المدائن). “Flower of the Cities” [Fairuz/Rahbani Brothers]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyPJ9S8mD90&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Arja’ Ya Alf Leila (ارجعي يا ألف ليلة). “Return, Oh Thousand Nights” [Fairuz/Rahbani Brothers; lyrics Rafiq Khoury]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn8r0ARgTlg&frags=pl%2Cwn>

La la la Qatala ‘Ayoon al-Hawa Qatala (لا لا له قتالة عيون الهوا قتالة). “No, no, the eyes of love are killing me” [Nasri Shamseddine]

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIT-_nDdHNE&frags=pl%2Cwn

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2WYTufeg-M&frags=pl%2Cwn>

Nzilna ‘al-Shawarya (نزلنا الشوارع). “We Took to the Streets” [Walid Abdalsalam]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjNcwSZ-Lr8&frags=pl%2Cwn>

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